

A CEREMONIAL RESOLUTION

IN THE COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

To recognize the anniversary of Emancipation Day in the District of Columbia on April 16, 2021, honor the history of this important day, and to reflect on the progress made and the progress still needed to achieve racial equity and justice for Black District residents.

WHEREAS, slavery in the District of Columbia region increased after 1790, when Congress passed the Residence Act to move the nation’s capital from Philadelphia to the “Potomac River” 10 years later;

WHEREAS, in anticipation of the capital’s move, the federal government began construction of the U.S. Capitol Building and the White House, using slave labor;

WHEREAS, despite building the city we all call home today, Black men and women were not freed until 1862, over 70 years later;

WHEREAS, on April 16, 1862, President Abraham Lincoln signed into law, the “District of Columbia Compensated Emancipation Act” abolishing slavery in the nation’s capital, nine months ahead of the abolition of slavery nationally through the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863;

WHEREAS, with the signing of the Compensated Emancipation Act, 3,100 enslaved Black men, women, and children were emancipated, making them the first slaves freed in the United States during the Civil War;

32 WHEREAS, in April 1866, formerly enslaved District residents began an annual tradition
33 of celebrating the anniversary of their freedom with a parade down Pennsylvania Avenue every
34 April 16th;

35 WHEREAS, every sitting United States President from 1866 to 1901 received the District
36 of Columbia Emancipation Day Parade;

37 WHEREAS, on March 8, 2000 during the Twenty Seventh Legislative Session, the
38 Council of the District of Columbia unanimously approved the District of Columbia
39 Emancipation Day Emergency Amendment Act of 2000 to establish April 16th as a legal private
40 holiday, and former Mayor Anthony A. Williams signed it into law on March 23, 2000;

41 WHEREAS, in 2002, the District of Columbia passed the District of Columbia
42 Emancipation Day Fund Emergency Act of 2002, reinitiating the annual tradition began by the
43 first freed slaves in 1866;

44 WHEREAS, in 2004, Mayor's Order 2004-35, established the Emancipation
45 Commemoration Commission to develop plans, programs, projects, and activities to celebrate the
46 holiday, to highlight the struggle to overcome slavery, and to profile the African American
47 experience in the struggle for freedom, justice, and equality.

48 WHEREAS, on November 30, 2004, the District of Columbia Emancipation Day Parade
49 and Fund Act of 2004, established the Emancipation Day Fund to receive and disburse funds for
50 the Emancipation Day Parade and activities associated with the celebration and commemoration
51 of the District of Columbia Emancipation Day;

52 WHEREAS, in 2005, the District of Columbia Emancipation Day Amendment Act of
53 2004 established April 16th as a legal public holiday;

54 WHEREAS, Emancipation Day in the District is a day of celebration of the freedom of
55 men and women who should never have been enslaved;

56 WHEREAS, along with celebration, Emancipation Day is a reminder that the abolition of
57 slavery was only the first step of many in the fight for equal rights and protection for Black
58 Americans, which continues to this day, over a century later;

59 WHEREAS, gentrification threatens the ability of Black residents and business owners to
60 remain in their city, which their ancestors literally built;

61 WHEREAS, this Emancipation Day requires reflection on the events of this past year and
62 the stark disparities that exist between Black communities and others, including in treatment by
63 law enforcement, in health care as COVID-19 pandemic rages, in educational outcomes, and in
64 public investment;

65 WHEREAS, Emancipation Day is a call to action for every single person in the District
66 of Columbia that we must work together to end structural and systemic racism in our government
67 and society; and

68 WHEREAS, the fight for racial equity continues today and Emancipation Day signifies
69 that the District can lead the nation just as it lead the nation in abolishing slavery.

70 RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, That this
71 resolution may be cited as the “Emancipation Day Recognition Resolution of 2021”.

72 Sec. 2. The Council of the District of Columbia celebrates the anniversary of the abolition
73 of slavery in the District and recognizes the significance of the history of Emancipation Day and
74 the reminder of continued need for progress it provides.

75 Sec. 3. This resolution shall take effect immediately upon the first date of publication in
76 the District of Columbia Register.