

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

MASSACHUSETTS BLACK AND LATINO LEGISLATIVE CAUCUS

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Massachusetts Legislature Marks 150th Anniversary of its Ratification of the 15th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution

To mark this historic expansion of voting rights, the Massachusetts Black and Latino Legislative Caucus and Senator Jo Comerford have joined together to circulate a joint resolution celebrating the Commonwealth's ratification

Boston, MA—On this day in 1869, Massachusetts became the ninth state to ratify the Fifteenth Amendment to the U.S Constitution which extended voting rights to adult males over the age of 20 regardless of “race, color or previous condition of servitude.”

The Massachusetts Black and Latino Legislative Caucus is honoring this historic legislative milestone by circulating a joint resolution in partnership with Sen. Jo Comerford.

Comerford, having heard from constituents about their desire to recognize this milestone, brought the text of the resolution to the Black and Latino Legislative Caucus. The resolution will be presented in the House by Caucus Chair Rep. Carlos González, joined by Sen. Sonia Chang-Díaz in the Senate.

“It is important to acknowledge this day and highlight how far we have come. We do so to emphasize that we must not allow any incremental resurgence of voter suppression. Voting rights in America is paramount to promoting the sanctity of full voter enfranchisement,” noted State Representative Carlos Gonzalez González.

“Between widespread racial inequality, repeated attempts at voter suppression, and the continued underrepresentation of communities of color, it is clear that the promise of the 15th amendment has yet to be fully realized,” said State Senator Sonia Chang- Díaz. “As we celebrate this historic day, it’s critical that we recommit ourselves to fighting for equity and opportunity here in the Legislature this session,” she continued.

The joint resolution text follows and highlights the powerful arc of post-Civil War Constitutional Amendments, beginning with the Thirteenth Amendment, which abolished slavery, followed by the Fourteenth Amendment, which guaranteed citizenship to former slaves. The resolution also notes the profound connection between the Fifteenth Amendment and the Nineteenth Amendment, which—50 years later—guaranteed women the right to vote.

The Black and Latino Legislative Caucus is accepting sign-ons to the resolution until March 15, 2019.

COMMEMORATING THE ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY
OF THE RATIFICATION OF THE FIFTEENTH AMENDMENT
TO THE UNITED STATES CONSTITUTION
BY THE COMMONWEALTH

WHEREAS, This year marks the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution by the Commonwealth; and

WHEREAS, In the year 1868, the Fourteenth Amendment was ratified and formally adopted to the Constitution, thus establishing birthright citizenship to the nearly four million former slaves freed by the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863 and by the Thirteenth Amendment in 1865 following the end of the Civil War; and

WHEREAS, The Fourteenth Amendment furthermore established the basis of civil rights for all American citizens that includes due process and equal protection under the law; and

WHEREAS, The Fourteenth Amendment extended full congressional representation to all Americans, specifically with regards to those whom were previously enslaved and had historically received three-fifths representation; and

WHEREAS, This newly apportioned representation accordingly increased the size and power of those congressional delegations in all of the Southern states where African-Americans prevailed demographically but were nonetheless prevented by state and local laws from voting for their representatives in Congress whose districts were drawn from these disenfranchised populations; and

WHEREAS, The United States Congress sought to correct this imbalance of power by expanding the existing national voting franchise for white male citizens above twenty-one years to also include African-Americans of similar distinction; and

WHEREAS, Congress would propose the Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution which would prohibit the denial of voting rights on the basis of race, color, or previous condition of servitude; and

WHEREAS, On February 26, 1869, the United States Congress voted to approve the Fifteenth Amendment, submitting it to the states for ratification and its formal adoption to the United States Constitution; and

WHEREAS, On March 12, 1869, the General Court voted in favor of the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment, and the Commonwealth became the ninth state to approve the amendment before its formal adoption on March 30, 1870; and

WHEREAS, The Fifteenth Amendment was the first constitutional amendment to grant voting rights to formerly disenfranchised Americans and thereby set a precedent which fifty years later would lead to the adoption of the Nineteenth Amendment that granted universal voting rights to American women; and

WHEREAS, The Fifteenth Amendment has for the past one and a half centuries served as the foremost defense against systemic voter disenfranchisement that has endured over the generations and in this regard has thereby proven indispensable towards the establishment and preservation of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which has since fulfilled the original promise of ensuring full voting rights for Americans of every racial or ethnic background and nationality; and

WHEREAS, In recognition of this historic action by the General Court to amend the United States Constitution as the supreme law of the land for the purpose of upholding the fundamental democratic principles enshrined by the immortal words of its preamble; therefore be it

RESOLVED, That the Massachusetts General Court hereby commemorates the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution by the Commonwealth.

The Massachusetts Black and Latino Legislative Caucus is a group of state legislators seeking to define, highlight and analyze those issues and concerns affecting people of color in the Commonwealth. For more information, please visit: www.mablacklatinocaucus.com

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