

BOROUGH OF HIGHLAND PARK
NO. 5-22-139

**A RESOLUTION ENDORSING THE ENACTMENT OF ASSEMBLY BILL A938/S386,
THE "NEW JERSEY REPARATIONS TASK FORCE ACT"**

WHEREAS, this is a resolution endorsing the establishment of the “New Jersey Reparations Task Force” to conduct research and develop reparatory proposals and recommendations to address the generational harms caused by New Jersey’s role in America’s institution of slavery and its legacy of systemic racial discrimination; and

WHEREAS, the Borough of Highland Park is a multicultural and diverse community; and

WHEREAS, over four hundred years ago, enslaved Africans were brought to Jamestown, Virginia as captives; and

WHEREAS, from 1619 to 1865, approximately 4,000,000 Africans and their descendants, under a practice that was constitutionally and statutorily sanctioned, were enslaved in the United States and the colonies that became the United States; and

WHEREAS, the system of slavery that flourished in the United States constituted an immoral, shameful, and inhumane deprivation of the life, liberty, humanity, citizenship, and cultural heritage of Africans and also denied them, among other things, the fruits of their own labor upon which this country, and its economy, was built; and

WHEREAS, an overwhelming body of scholarship, legal and community evidentiary documentation, and the modern day lived experiences of the descendants of enslaved Africans form the basis for inquiry into the ongoing effects of the institution of slavery and its legacy of persistent systemic structures of discrimination on living Black people and communities in the United States; and

WHEREAS, following the abolition of slavery, state actors at the federal, state, and local level continued to perpetuate, condone, and profit from practices that continued to brutalize and systemically disadvantage Black people, including sharecropping, convict leasing, Jim Crow laws, redlining, unequal education, and disproportionate treatment at the hands of the criminal justice system; and

WHEREAS, contrary to what many people believe, slavery was not just a Southern institution and took root very deeply in New Jersey. In the early 17th Century, the first enslaved African people arrived in New Netherland, a Dutch settlement established in the Mid-Atlantic, which included portions of present-day New Jersey; and

WHEREAS, in 1844, New Jersey also restricted access to the ballot box by denying the vote to people with criminal convictions the same year it restricted voting to white men in its Constitution, the first state in the Northeast to do so. While many Northern states abolished slavery following the Civil War, New Jersey opposed the Emancipation Proclamation and was

the last Northern state to abolish slavery. Following the Civil War, New Jersey refused to ratify the Reconstruction Amendments; and

WHEREAS, a direct line can be traced from New Jersey's role in American slavery to its system today of voter suppression, racial wealth disparities, mass incarceration, racial segregation, and crumbling infrastructure in Black communities in New Jersey, such as the current elevated lead levels in water and homes; and

WHEREAS, the full effects of the institution and legacy of slavery on Black people and communities in New Jersey have not been sufficiently examined, nor have there been remedies for past injustice and present harm, or sufficient efforts at transformation; and

WHEREAS, as a result of historic and continued systemic racial discrimination, Black people in New Jersey confront some of the worst racial disparities in America, including but not limited to these areas; and

WHEREAS, Generations of African American youth have experienced racism in the youth justice system. Today, Black children are almost 18 times more likely to be locked up than white children, the highest disparity rate in America, even though Black and white children commit most offenses at similar rates. As of February 9, 2022, just 11 white children are incarcerated in New Jersey, compared to 65 Black children, according to State data; and

WHEREAS, New Jersey also experienced racially restrictive covenants that prohibited Black people from buying, leasing, or occupying property based on race, and redlining, which targeted Black people who were refused housing loans. Because home ownership is a primary driver of wealth, Black people in New Jersey confront one of the worst racial wealth gaps in America. The median net worth for New Jersey's white families is \$309,000, the highest in the nation. For New Jersey's Black families, it is incredibly just \$5,900, respectively. New Jersey also leads the nation in home foreclosures, according to ATTOM Data Solutions; and

WHEREAS, to address these systemic challenges in New Jersey, the "New Jersey Reparations Task Force" will research, write, and publish a report that will make the case for State-based reparations in New Jersey and outline policy recommendations that seek to repair the harm that has resulted from America's original sin in the Garden State and its aftermath; and

WHEREAS, it is in the interest of the State and of the people of New Jersey for the government to initiate and foster methods of improving knowledge and understanding between African Americans and other ethnic groups in New Jersey and to adopt and initiate means to foster communication and dialogue, for the purpose of achieving truth, transformation, and reparation. Therefore, it is in the interest of the State and the people of New Jersey to establish the "New Jersey Reparations Task Force" to urge New Jersey to take responsibility for its role in American slavery and its aftermath, and to set forth comprehensive and sweeping policy recommendations aimed to develop profound and reparative financial and other investments in Black communities impacted by New Jersey's history of systemic racial discrimination; and

WHEREAS, the urgency for the establishment of this task force is compelling. The elder African American population, some of whom are the grandchildren of formerly enslaved Black people and can bear direct witness to some of the severest forms of racism and oppression, is

advancing in age. As too many generations of Black people have already passed without benefit of any remedies for the injustices they endured, it is important that New Jersey make the establishment of this task force an imperative; and

WHEREAS, this resolution endorses that the task force recommend appropriate ways to educate the New Jersey public of the task force’s findings.

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Mayor and Council of the Borough of Highland Park that this body fully endorses the enactment of the “New Jersey Reparations Task Force” bill; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Municipal Clerk is hereby directed to forward a certified copy of this resolution to the New Jersey Assembly and the New Jersey Senate, including the Borough’s local representatives of those bodies.

ADOPTED: May 17, 2022

ATTEST:

Jennifer Santiago, Borough Clerk

I, Jennifer Santiago, Borough Clerk of the Borough of Highland Park, New Jersey, do hereby certify the above to be a true copy of a resolution adopted by the Borough Council of said Borough of Highland Park at its regular meeting held on the 17th day of May 2022.

Jennifer Santiago, Borough Clerk

RECORD OF COUNCIL VOTES

Council Member	Ayes	Nays	Abstain	Absent
Canavera				
Foster				
George				
Hale				
Hersh				
Kim-Chohan				