SPONSOR: Rep. Bolden & Sen. Henry & Rep. J. Johnson & Rep. Keeley & Rep. Potter; Reps. Baumbach, Bentz, Heffernan, Kowalko, Longhurst, Lynn, Osienski, Paradee, B. Short, M. Smith; Sens. Marshall, Peterson, Townsend

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
148th GENERAL ASSEMBLY

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 10

APOLOGIZING FOR THE WRONGS OF SLAVERY AND EXPRESSING DELAWARE'S PROFOUND REGRET FOR ITS ROLE IN SLAVERY.

WHEREAS, during the course of the infamous Atlantic slave trade of the 16th to 19th centuries, millions of Africans were forcibly abducted to and enslaved in the New World, and millions more died during passage; and

WHEREAS, the Atlantic slave trade was a lucrative enterprise and African slaves, a prized commodity to support the economic base of plantations in the colonies, were traded for tropical products, manufactured goods, sugar, molasses, and other merchandise; and

WHEREAS, to prime Africans for slavery, the fundamental values of Africans were shattered; they were brutalized, humiliated, dehumanized, and subjected to the indignity of being stripped of their names and heritage; women and girls were raped and families were disassembled as husbands and wives, mothers and daughters, fathers and sons were sold into slavery apart from one another; and

WHEREAS, Delaware sanctioned and perpetuated slavery for approximately 226 years, through its laws and practice throughout its colonial period and beyond; and

WHEREAS, Delaware enslaved Africans and Native Americans in the mid-1600s and its entire slave population was of African descent by the close of the 1700s; and

WHEREAS, Delaware criminalized humanitarian attempts to assist slaves, including enacting laws which prohibited aiding, employing, or concealing a slave without his or her master’s consent, and punished abolitionists who helped transport thousands of escaped slaves through the Underground Railroad in Delaware; and

WHEREAS, the system of slavery and the visceral racism against persons of African descent upon which it depended became embedded in the U.S.’s social fabric, including Delaware’s; and

WHEREAS, although the U.S. outlawed the transatlantic slave trade in 1808, the domestic slave trade in the colonies continued until slavery was abolished in 1865, through the enactment of the 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which Delaware voted to reject that year; and

WHEREAS, Delaware was one of the last 3 states to abolish slavery; and

LC : HVW : RAY
5081480067
Released: 01/06/2016 12:21 PM

WHEREAS, after emancipation from centuries of slavery, African-Americans soon saw the political, social, and economic gains they made during Reconstruction dissipated by virulent racism, lynchings, disenfranchisement of African-American voters, and the system of de jure racial segregation known as "Jim Crow" laws, which arose following the abolition of slavery to create separate and unequal societies for whites and African-Americans; and

WHEREAS, Delaware passed and enforced Jim Crow laws to deny the rights of African-American citizens for much of the 20th century; and

WHEREAS, Delaware continued to discriminate against those of color by approving segregation of education in its Constitution, a practice which lasted until the U.S. Supreme Court's landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954; and

WHEREAS, African-Americans continue to suffer from the complex interplay between slavery and Jim Crow, long after both systems were formally abolished, through enormous damage and loss, including the loss of human dignity, the frustration of careers and professional lives, and the long-term loss of opportunity; and

WHEREAS, Delaware today is impacted by the lasting legacy of slavery, including ongoing tension between races and the existence of institutional racism; and

WHEREAS, the story of enslavement and segregation of African-Americans and the dehumanizing atrocities committed against them should not be purged from or minimized in the telling of Delaware's history; moreover, the faith, perseverance, hope, and endless triumphs of African-Americans and significant contributions to the development of this State and the nation should be embraced, celebrated, and retold for generation to come; and

WHEREAS, the perpetual pain, distrust, and bitterness of many African-Americans could be assuaged, the principles espoused by the Founding Fathers would be affirmed, and great strides toward unifying all Delawareans and inspiring the nation to come together might be accomplished, if the State acknowledged and apologized for its role in slavery; and

WHEREAS, an apology for centuries of brutal dehumanization and injustices cannot erase the past, but acknowledgement of the wrongs committed can speed racial healing and reconciliation and help Delawareans confront the ghosts of their past; and

WHEREAS, 8 states have issued resolutions apologizing for slavery; and

WHEREAS, it is important for Delaware to make a formal apology for slavery and Jim Crow, so that it can move forward and seek reconciliation, justice, and harmony for all of its citizens:

NOW, THEREFORE:

BE IT RESOLVED by the House of Representatives and the Senate of the 148th General Assembly of the State of Delaware, with the approval of the Governor, that the General Assembly:

(a) Acknowledges the fundamental injustice, cruelty, brutality, and inhumanity of slavery and Jim Crow.

(b) Apologizes, on behalf of the people of Delaware, for the State's role in slavery and the wrongs committed against African-Americans and their ancestors who suffered under slavery and Jim Crow.

(c) Expresses its deepest sympathies and solemn regrets to those who were enslaved and the descendants of those slaves, who were deprived of life, human dignity, and the constitutional protections accorded all citizens of the United States.

(d) Recognizes the need to address and educate Delawareans about the social stigma, stereotyping, bias, and discrimination which still exist in the State today as vestiges of the institution of slavery.

(e) Expresses its commitment to rectify the lingering consequences of the misdeeds committed against African-Americans under slavery and Jim Crow and to stop the occurrence of human rights violations in the future.

(f) Implores all Delawareans to be tolerant and understanding of one another, with the goal of eliminating all racial bias, prejudice, and discriminatory behavior, and to remember and teach their children about the history of slavery and Jim Crow laws to ensure that these tragedies will be neither forgotten nor repeated.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that it is the intent of the General Assembly that this Joint Resolution shall not be used in, or be the basis of, any type of litigation.

SYNOPSIS

In 2007, the Virginia General Assembly became the first state legislature to formally acknowledge and apologize for a state's involvement in slavery. To date, the legislatures of 8 of the 18 states which had slaves in 1860 – Alabama, Connecticut, Florida, Maryland, New Jersey, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia – have apologized for their roles in slavery. The U.S. House of Representatives passed a resolution in 2008 apologizing for slavery and subsequent discriminatory laws, and the U.S. Senate passed a similar resolution in 2009.

This Joint Resolution:

(a) Acknowledges the fundamental injustice, cruelty, brutality, and inhumanity of slavery and Jim Crow laws.

(b) Apologizes, on behalf of the people of Delaware, for the State's role in slavery and the wrongs committed against African-Americans and their ancestors who suffered under slavery and Jim Crow, after the Emancipation Proclamation.

(c) Expresses the General Assembly's deepest sympathies and solemn regrets to those who were enslaved and the descendants of those slaves, who were deprived of life, human dignity, and the constitutional protections accorded all citizens of the United States.

(d) Recognizes the need to address and educate Delawareans of the social stigma, stereotyping, bias, and discrimination which prevail in the State today as vestiges of the institution of slavery.

(e) Expresses the General Assembly's commitment to rectify the lingering consequences of the misdeeds committed against African-Americans under slavery and Jim Crow and to stop the occurrence of human rights violations in the future.

(f) Implores all Delawareans to be tolerant and understanding of one another, with a goal of eliminating all racial bias, prejudice, and discriminatory behavior, and to teach their children about the history of slavery and Jim Crow laws to ensure that these tragedies will be neither forgotten nor repeated.

By making this joint resolution, the General Assembly wishes to promote reconciliation and healing, avert the repetition of past wrongs, and propagate the American and Delawarean ideals of life, liberty, justice, and happiness.