SPONSOR: Rep. Dorsey Walker & Sen. Brown
Reps. Harris, Chukwuocha, Bolden, Cooke, K. Johnson, Lambert, Minor-Brown, S. Moore, Neal, Parker Selby, Phillips, Wilson-Anton, Carson, Bush; Sens. Lockman, Pinkney, Buckson, Gay, Hansen, Hocker, Hoffner, Huxtable, Lawson, Mantzavinos, S. McBride, Paradee, Pettyjohn, Poore, Richardson, Sokola, Sturgeon, Townsend, Walsh, Wilson

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
152nd GENERAL ASSEMBLY

# HOUSE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 110

RECOGNIZING THE 4TH THURSDAY IN MARCH AS NATIONAL TUSKEGEE AIRMEN COMMEMORATION DAY.

WHEREAS, the Tuskegee Airmen were a group of Black pilots, aircrew, ground crew, and support personnel of the U.S. Army Air Corps who fought in World War II. As the first African American flying units in the U.S. military, their many successes paved the way for the desegregation of the U.S. military, which started in 1948 when President Harry S. Truman signed Executive Order 9981; and

WHEREAS, the history of the Tuskegee Airmen dates back to World War I, when African American men attempted to serve in U.S. air units but were denied entry; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Andre Swygert of Wilmington, Delaware, one of the most knowledgeable people in our state on the history of the Tuskegee Airmen, and himself the son of a member of the airmen, has thus far in the course of his research been able to identify 13 Delawareans who served in one or another of the units that were a part of the Tuskegee Airmen; and he believes that further research will reveal more Delawareans who were a part of the airmen; and

WHEREAS, according to Mr. Swygert's research, those Delawareans known thus far to have served with the Tuskegee Airmen include the following: John H. Porter, Pilot, 44-C-SE; Fred T. Johnson, Navigator, 45-12A; Clayo T. Rice, Pilot, 45-A-SE; James O. Handy, Mechanic, 99th Fighter Squadron; Littleton P. Mitchell, Simulator Instructor; James E. Talton, Flight Officer, 45-F-TE; Donald S. Jamison, Flight Officer, 45-F-TE; Louis R. Purnell, Pilot, 45-B-SE; Dr. Luna I. Mishoe, Intelligence Officer, 477th Bomb Group; Artishia Stephens, Special Order Clerk; Henry Smith, Armorer; Maxwell Honemond, Liaison Pilot, US Army; Nathan Thomas, Information/Education Specialist; John E. Brown, Jr., 617th BS, 477th Bomb Group; David L. Dempsey, 617th BS, 477th Bomb Group; Saralie Draper, Squadron A, 118th AAFBU; George A. Laws, 590th Mat'l Squadron; and James H. Money, 66th AAFFTD Medical Detachment; and



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WHEREAS, Mr. Swygert has noted that "the database of all participants in the 'Tuskegee Experience' consists of approximately 14,000 names" and that "further research may uncover additional personnel from Delaware;" and

WHEREAS, another important note is that many of these men and women-those from Delaware and elsewhere-went on to have very distinguished careers in many fields in civilian life after the war; and

WHEREAS, by 1939, only 25 African Americans were licensed pilots in the United States. This stark inequity finally forced Congress to act. On June 27, 1939, Congress passed the Civilian Pilot Training Act, which prohibited exclusion based on race from federally funded pilot training programs; and

WHEREAS, six Black colleges participated in the program: Howard University, Delaware State College, Hampton University, North Carolina A&T, Tuskegee Institute, and West Virginia State College. These necessary advancements in Black aviation laid the groundwork for the extraordinary achievements of African American Aviators in World War II; and

WHEREAS, the illustrious service record of the Tuskegee Airmen began on March 19, 1941, when the United States Army Air Corps officially constituted the 99th Pursuit Squadron as the first all-Black combat squadron in the United States Armed Forces. The squadron was trained at the newly constructed Tuskegee Army Air Field in Tuskegee, Alabama, a few miles away from the Tuskegee Institute; and

WHEREAS, by June 1943, the renamed 99th Fighter Squadron was flying combat missions over Sicily and the Mediterranean, supporting Allied bombers, naval formations, and other offensives. The Tuskegee Airmen scored several aerial victories against German FW-190s, BF-109s, and ME-262s, eventually earning three Distinguished Unit Citations in combat missions over the Mediterranean and Central Europe; and

WHEREAS, by World War II's end, three other all-Black Fighter Squadrons were activated, all under the 332nd Fighter Group, as well as the 477th Bombardment Group flying B-25 medium bombers. Despite their successes, the Tuskegee Airmen endured extreme adversity, including notably prejudiced and unsuccessful attempts to disband the 332nd Fighter Group. The Tuskegee Airmen flew over 15,000 combat sorties in World War II and received 744 air medals, including 96 Distinguished Flying Crosses, 14 Bronze Stars, and 8 Purple Hearts; and

WHEREAS, as World War II ended, the Tuskegee Airmen in the 477th Bombardment Group staged a nonviolent demonstration to desegregate the officer's club at Freeman Field, Indiana. Their demonstration for racial equity, staged between April 5-6, 1945, would prove to be a catalyst for the eventual desegregation of the U.S. Armed Forces. After the war, the Tuskegee Airmen won one last aerial victory in 1949 when they won the first ever U.S. Air Force Aerial Gunnery Competition (propeller), now known as "Top Gun," beating the best pilots in the U.S. Air Force. By July of 1949, the 332nd Fighter Group, the 477th Bombardment Group, and all other all-Black Aviation units of the U.S. Air Force were deactivated as the U.S. military finally moved toward full racial integration; and

WHEREAS, The Tuskegee Airmen achieved unparalleled success, not just for their martial excellence but for their grit and determination as a trailblazing unit that would prove segregation a failed and unjust policy.

NOW, THEREFORE:

BE IT RESOLVED by the House of Representatives of the 152nd General Assembly of the State of Delaware, the Senate concurring therein, that the General Assembly hereby supports Congressional efforts to proclaim the fourth Thursday in March as National Tuskegee Airmen Commemoration Day.

SYNOPSIS

This Concurrent Resolution supports Congressional efforts to proclaim the fourth Thursday in March a National Tuskegee Airmen Commemoration Day.