

BY: M. of A. Buttenschon

RECOGNIZING August 2020, as Karen American Heritage Month

WHEREAS, This Legislative Body is justly proud to recognize August 2020, as Karen American Heritage Month; and

WHEREAS, The Karen are an ethnolinguistic group of Sino-Tibetan language-speaking ethnic groups; and

WHEREAS, These Karen groups reside primarily in Kayin State in the southern and southeastern portions of Myanmar; and

WHEREAS, In the late 20th Century, many Karen people were forced to flee to refugee camps along the Thai/Burma (Myanmar) border; and

WHEREAS, In 2007, about 150,000 refugees were already living in nine camps along the Thai/Burma border: Ban Don Yang, Ban Kwai/Nai Soi, Ban Mae Surin, Mae La, Mae La Oon, Mae Ra Ma Luang, Nu Po, Tham Hin and Umpiem Mai; and

WHEREAS, Some refugees have been in the camps for more than two decades; and

WHEREAS, Karen people make up 90 percent of residents in the refugee camps; the first wave of Karen refugees fled to Thailand in January of 1984; and

WHEREAS, Large numbers of refugees are now leaving the camps in Thailand because the Thai government is trying to shut them down; more people are also fleeing Burma, creating an overflow in the camps; and

WHEREAS, The Karen population throughout the world is estimated at about 3 million to 6 million; 70 percent are Theravada Buddhists, and 20 percent to 30 percent are Christian; they all value education; and

WHEREAS, By trade, they are farmers, weavers, basket makers, teachers, small traders, medics or traditional healers and religious leaders; and

WHEREAS, Like the Montagnards who helped United States soldiers during the Vietnam War, the Karen aided British troops against Japanese occupation during World War II; and

WHEREAS, Beginning in 2000, the Karen started resettling in the United States and Canada; and

WHEREAS, The State of Minnesota has the highest concentrated population of Karen people in America; other states with significant Karen populations include California, Texas, New York and Indiana; according to the Minnesota Karen Association, there were more than

17,000 Karen living in Minnesota in 2017; and

WHEREAS, Karen's two most important holidays are The Karen New Year which usually falls in December-January because the Karen people follow the lunar calendar, and The Karen Wrist Tying which is observed annually in August throughout the world; and

WHEREAS, They come together and celebrate Karen New Year and Karen Wrist Tying throughout the State of New York; for the past few years, they have celebrated their holiday in Albany, Utica, Syracuse, Rochester, and Buffalo; and

WHEREAS, Karen people enjoy meals which consists of rice, fish paste, vegetables, and sometimes meat; they also enjoy spicy food; and

WHEREAS, Karen throughout the United States attended rallies in Washington and New York to oppose the government oppression in Rangoon, Burma's largest city; and

WHEREAS, After a consultation conference on June 13, 2018, Karen Organization of the United States of America (KOUSA) and Karen American Organization (KAO) leaders explored the possibility of working together and merging the two organizations in order to improve operational effectiveness, increase cooperation, strengthen and acclimate Karen communities in the United States; and

WHEREAS, The leaders of the two groups agreed to merge and collaborate as one entity and became the Karen Organization of America in August of 2018, in Omaha, Nebraska; and

WHEREAS, Today, the Karen Organization of America offers extensive resources and support to help the refugees survive and thrive in a new land; their mission is to maintain Karen history, keep Karen traditions alive, and help bring Karen people together from all around the world; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to recognize August 2020, as Karen American Heritage Month; and be it further

RESOLVED, That a copy of this Resolution, suitably engrossed, be transmitted to the Karen Organization of America.