

BY: Senator KENNEDY

MEMORIALIZING Governor Kathy Hochul to proclaim September 2023, as Underground Railroad Month in the State of New York

WHEREAS, It is the custom of this Legislative Body to recognize official months that are set aside to celebrate the history and heroism that guided America to freedom; and

WHEREAS, Attendant to such concern and in full accord with its long-standing traditions, this Legislative Body is justly proud to memorialize Governor Kathy Hochul to proclaim September 2023, as Underground Railroad Month in the State of New York; and

WHEREAS, This vital month of recognition was established in 2019, when the State of Maryland proclaimed September as International Underground Railroad Month; September was chosen to represent this designation as it is the month two of the most well-known freedom seekers and Underground Railroad operatives, Frederick Douglass and Harriet Tubman, escaped from slavery; and

WHEREAS, New York State is proud of its landmarks and institutions which are important symbols of the Black community's heritage, quest for freedom, and profound legacy in our State and Nation; these milestone sites include many stops along the Underground Railroad, a network of clandestine routes, churches, community resources, and safe houses established in the United States during the early 19th century by abolitionists and other individuals offering shelter and aid to enslaved Black persons in order to facilitate their escape into free states and Canada; and

WHEREAS, The Underground Railroad movement was a transformative period in New York State and the United States, as communities across the country saw the rise of pro-and anti-slavery activities and, while the movement originated in the Deep South, the North was the destination for many enslaved persons in flight, who sought freedom in safe regions above the Mason-Dixon Line; and

WHEREAS, The breadth and scope of New York's role in the Underground Railroad was vast and varied, as our State was a gateway to liberation for freedom-seekers along the eastern seaboard who found accessibility to Canada and major water routes, protection among New York State's large and vocal freed Black population, support from powerful and active anti-slavery organizations, and a strong network of Underground Railroad leaders; and

WHEREAS, Following the abolition of slavery in New York in 1827, the movement gained momentum, and our State became home to well-known abolitionists including John Brown, Gerrit Smith, Frederick Douglass, and Harriet Tubman, the Underground Railroad's most famous "conductor" who guided 300 slaves to freedom while making 19 daring rescue trips to

the South and whose home in the City of Auburn is now part of the Harriet Tubman National Historical Park, as well as other heroic persons with the conviction and courage to join in these missions to freedom; and

WHEREAS, Through the National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom Act of 1998, the National Park Service established the National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom Program to tell the story of resistance against slavery in the United States by means of escape and flight, and to illustrate the significance of the Underground Railroad in the abolition of slavery through nationwide preservation and education efforts and by integrating local historical sites, museums, interpretive resources, and other facilities and places with verifiable links to the Underground Railroad; and

WHEREAS, New York State's significant presence and place in the "Network to Freedom" is represented by events, tours, and research centers, as well as 22 historic sites, seven churches, and four marked sites which highlight the Underground Railroad experience; and

WHEREAS, In August of 2012, New York State unveiled its "Path Through History" to showcase various themes in New York State's rich heritage and history, including Civil Rights, through a program that promotes historically and culturally significant sites, locations, and events across the Empire State, featuring several hundred of the most important landmarks and milestones in the State, many of them related to the Underground Railroad, the abolitionist movement, and our country's emerging civil rights movement; and

WHEREAS, New York State has always shown an inspiring commitment to civil, social, economic, political and human rights, from its early actions to end statewide slavery, to its historic role as a link in the Underground Railroad helping to bring formerly enslaved Black persons to freedom; today our State remains dedicated to advancing the course of progress for all people and joins other states in this important observance that welcomes residents and visitors, inviting them to explore a "Path Through History" to learn more about our State's pivotal role in the Underground Railroad; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to memorialize Governor Kathy Hochul to proclaim September 2023, as Underground Railroad Month in the State of New York; and be it further

RESOLVED, That a copy of this Resolution, suitably engrossed, be transmitted to The Honorable Kathy Hochul, Governor of the State of New York.