

Senate Resolution No. 1535

BY: Senator STEWART-COUSINS

MEMORIALIZING Governor Kathy Hochul to proclaim February 2026, as Black History Month in the State of New York

WHEREAS, Black History Month serves as an opportunity to recognize and celebrate the ingenuity, achievements, contributions, and resilience of African Americans throughout history; and

WHEREAS, It is essential to recognize some of the most integral parts of Black history, including the struggles; and

WHEREAS, The Civil War was a defining moment in American history, fought over the issue of slavery, leading to the eventual liberation of millions of African Americans; and

WHEREAS, The Emancipation Proclamation, signed by President Abraham Lincoln on January 1, 1863, declared that all enslaved individuals in Confederate-held territories were to be freed, marking a critical step toward the abolition of slavery; and

WHEREAS, The passage of the 13th Amendment to the United States Constitution on December 6, 1865, formally abolished slavery in the United States, securing the freedom of African Americans and paving the way for future civil rights advancements; and

WHEREAS, In the face of enslavement, segregation, and discrimination, Black Americans built institutions, advanced knowledge, preserved culture, and generated ideas that have profoundly shaped the economic, scientific, artistic, and moral foundations of this Nation; and

WHEREAS, Black History Month was originally established as Negro History Week in 1926 by Dr. Carter G. Woodson, a historian and educator; the celebration was later expanded to a month-long observance, recognized nationally each February to honor the enduring and profound impact of African Americans on the history, culture, and progress of the United States; and

WHEREAS, Black resilience has also been a driving force in the progress and expansion of democracy and civil rights in the United States; the Civil Rights Movement stands as one of the greatest testaments to Black ingenuity and determination, as African Americans organized visionary legal strategies, built powerful grassroots coalitions, and employed innovative forms of resistance that reshaped the moral and political landscape of the United States; and

WHEREAS, The Civil Rights Movement was propelled by the brilliance and determination of leaders such as the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., whose moral vision and strategic nonviolent resistance galvanized a national movement; Rosa Parks, whose courageous refusal to surrender her

seat ignited the Montgomery Bus Boycott; John Lewis, whose unwavering commitment to justice and leadership on the front lines of the Freedom Rides and the Selma marches expanded voting rights nationwide; Ella

Baker, whose visionary organizing models empowered grassroots leadership and fueled the Civil Rights Movement; Bayard Rustin, whose strategic mastery was central to the success of the 1963 March on Washington; A. Philip Randolph, whose pioneering leadership in the labor movement and founding of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters linked economic justice to civil rights and helped lay the groundwork for national civil rights mobilization; and Fannie Lou Hamer, whose fearless advocacy for voting rights expanded democratic participation and inspired national reform; and

WHEREAS, Black ingenuity has always been a defining force in shaping this Nation, exemplified by innovators such as Garrett Morgan, who invented the three-position traffic signal and the safety hood that saved countless lives; Dr. Charles Drew, who revolutionized modern medicine through his breakthroughs in blood banking and plasma storage; George Washington Carver, who developed hundreds of agricultural innovations that transformed American farming; Benjamin Banneker, who built one of the first American clocks and contributed to the surveying of Washington, D.C.; Madam C.J. Walker, the first woman to become a self-made millionaire in the United States, created a national hair-care enterprise and one of the earliest networks of Black women entrepreneurs; Lonnie Johnson, a NASA engineer and prolific inventor known for the Super Soaker and more than 100 patents; all of these individuals and more embody the creativity, brilliance, and transformative impact of Black Americans throughout history; and

WHEREAS, The creativity of Black Americans is equally reflected in the cultural, artistic, and musical contributions that have shaped the Nation, including the fact that jazz, one of America's most influential and enduring art forms, was created by Black musicians, as seen in the work of Louis Armstrong, whose music and talent transformed the genre, and Duke Ellington, who redefined orchestral composition and globalized Black musical traditions; and

WHEREAS, Across generations, Black artists have shaped every major genre of American music from blues, gospel, and jazz, to rock, pop, R&B, and soul; Black musicians continued to innovate, creating new musical forms, including rap and hip-hop, which emerged as transformative genres and global cultural movements pioneered by visionaries such as DJ Kool Herc, Grandmaster Flash, Afrika Bambaataa, The Sugarhill Gang, Run-D.M.C., Public Enemy, and Queen Latifah, among others; and

WHEREAS, In literature, the voices of Black authors and literary giants have long served as a conscience for the Nation, offering narratives that challenge, inspire, and reveal profound truths about American life, including the work of Zora Neale Hurston, whose anthropological and literary brilliance preserved Black folklore and reshaped American literature; James Baldwin, whose insightful essays, novels, and moral clarity challenged the Nation to confront the realities of race, identity, and democracy; Maya Angelou, whose poetry, memoirs, and activism gave voice to the Black experience and broadened

the scope of American literature; and Toni Morrison, who made literary history as the first African American woman to win the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1993; and

WHEREAS, In recent decades, Black Americans have continued to drive innovation and shape the modern world, as demonstrated by Robert L. Johnson, who became the first Black male billionaire after founding

Black Entertainment Television (BET), transforming representation in television and entertainment; Sheila Johnson, a co-founder of BET and a pioneering business leader in hospitality and sports; Dr. Kizzmekia Corbett, whose scientific expertise was central to the development of the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine; and Rihanna, whose Fenty brands revolutionized beauty and fashion through inclusive design and became the youngest self-made Black female billionaire; and

WHEREAS, Black athletes have transformed American sports and global athletics; from Jesse Owens, whose four gold medals at the 1936 Olympics defied racism on the world stage, to Jackie Robinson, who broke Major League Baseball's color barrier in 1947, and boxing champion, Muhammad Ali, whose unmatched skill and moral courage made him one of the most influential and decorated athletes in history; this legacy of excellence continues through modern champions such as Serena Williams, one of the most dominant tennis players of all time; Simone Biles, the most decorated American gymnast in history; and contemporary stars across basketball, football, track, and beyond, including LeBron James, Stephen Curry, Gabby Thomas, and Sydney McLaughlin-Levrone, who carry forward a tradition of athletic excellence, cultural impact, and leadership on and off the field; and

WHEREAS, The legacy of trailblazers in civil rights, politics, science, and space has paved the way for new milestones in the arts, global culture, and sports, demonstrating the enduring impact of Black achievement across time; and

WHEREAS, Black History Month affirms that Black history is American history, and recognizes that the struggles, triumphs, and contributions of Black Americans are deeply rooted in the American dream and woven into the very fabric of this Nation's story; and

WHEREAS, This Legislative Body commends the African-American community for preserving, for future generations, its centuries-old traditions that benefit us all and add to the color and beauty of the tapestry which is our American society; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to memorialize Governor Kathy Hochul to proclaim February 2026, as Black History Month in the State of New York; and be it further

RESOLVED, That copies of this Resolution, suitably engrossed, be transmitted to The Honorable Kathy Hochul, Governor of the State of New York; and to the events commemorating Black History Month throughout New York State.