

BY: Senator MAY

HONORING the Black history trailblazers of New York State's Cayuga and Onondaga Counties

WHEREAS, It is the sense of this Legislative Body to recognize and celebrate the achievements, contributions, and resilience of Black Americans throughout history; and

WHEREAS, Attendant to such concern, and in full accord with its long-standing traditions, this Legislative Body is justly proud to honor the Black history trailblazers of New York State's Cayuga and Onondaga Counties in conjunction with the observance of the 100th Anniversary of Black History Month; and

WHEREAS, New York State's Cayuga County is host to numerous Black trailblazers whose historic "first" accomplishments contributed invaluable to our State's rich history and wealth of diversity, including Harry and Kate Freeman were foundational figures in the development of Auburn, New York in the early 1800s; further, Morgan "Luke" Freeman and the Freedman family have been regarded as the "guardians" of Harriet Tubman-Davis and her legacy, escorting her to their home in Auburn; and

WHEREAS, Harriet Tubman-Davis, a prominent figure in New York State and U.S. history, lived on South Street in Auburn; she is renowned as an Underground Railroad conductor, a Civil War spy, and a humanitarian; she was deeply involved in the AME Zion Church and established the Harriet Tubman Home for the Aged; and

WHEREAS, Other notable figures who meaningfully contributed to the history of Cayuga County include Lena Johnson, the co-founder of Auburn's Booker T. Washington Community Center; Dr. Jerome H. "Brud" Holland, president of Hampton Institute (now Hampton University), the first Black person to serve on the board of the New York Stock Exchange, and former U.S. Ambassador to Sweden; Marcellus "Ben" White, the first Black mayor of Port Byron, New York and possibly the first Black mayor in New York State; Naomi Post Fletcher, NAACP member and preschool teacher who received a key to the city of Auburn; William Jackson, the founder and first President of the Auburn/Cayuga NAACP branch and former executive director of the Booker T. Washington Community Center; Gwen Webber-McLeod, author and the first Black woman to be appointed chair of the Auburn Industrial Development Authority; and

WHEREAS, Onondaga County's history is characterized by the achievements and actions of notable Black trailblazers whose admirable legacies have shaped our State's storied past and bright future, such as Isaac Wales, the first Black resident of the municipality now known as Syracuse, New York, who was a formerly enslaved man who helped build the Erie Canal in the 1800s, and was a renowned AME Zion minister and one of the best-known "stationmasters" of Syracuse's Underground Railroad; and

WHEREAS, Further, more notable trailblazers in Onondaga County include Sarah Loguen Fraser, the first Black doctor to graduate from Syracuse University's College of Medicine and one of the first Black women in the United States to earn an M.D.; William Herbert Johnson, the first African-American to graduate from Syracuse University's College of Law; Edmonia Highgate, a civil rights advocate and educator who served as a delegate at the 1864 National Convention of Colored Men held in Syracuse-one of the few women recognized at that national political gathering; Marjorie Carter, the first Black teacher in the Syracuse City School District; Peggy Wood, the first black woman to become a social worker in Onondaga County, who championed civil rights activism in Syracuse through housing and healthcare and education for teenage mothers; Frank Wood, director of Dunbar; Willie B. Gilbert, the first African American Syracuse police officer; Herman Edge, the first African American deputy chief of the Syracuse Police Department; The Honorable Langston C. McKinney, Syracuse's first Black City Court judge; Chester Whiteside, the first Black disc jockey, television commentator, and appointed Black Syracuse firefighter; Malchester Reeves, the first Black elected official in Syracuse; Van B. Robinson, the first Black president of the Syracuse Common Council and founder of the Syracuse chapter of the NAACP; Clarence "Junie" Dunham, the first Black man elected to the Onondaga County Legislature; Constance Timberlake, the first Black woman elected to the Syracuse Board of Education; and

WHEREAS, Throughout the twentieth century and up to this day, African-Americans, including many recent refugees from Africa, have continued to break down barriers in public service, elected office, commerce, education, science, medicine, philanthropy, and volunteerism, such as Cassandra Jones-Ingram, the first Black woman to serve in the Syracuse Police Department; The Honorable Sandra Towns, Syracuse's first Black woman elected to City Court; Danita Thomas, the first Black woman to serve in the Syracuse Fire Department; Lillie Fields, the first Black principal in the Liverpool Central School; Lovely Winslow, the first Black woman to become an Onondaga County Legislator; Bea Gonzales, the first Black Hispanic person to hold citywide office in Syracuse and the first Latina President of the Syracuse Common Council; Samuel D. Roberts, the first Black person to represent Onondaga County in the New York State Assembly; Linda Ervin, the first Black woman to serve as Minority Floor Leader of the Onondaga County Legislature, on the Jamesville DeWitt Board of Education, and to serve as president of the Board of Education; Michael Monds, the first Black Fire Chief of the Syracuse Fire Department; Melanie Littlejohn, the first Black president of the CNY Community Foundation; and Sheena Solomon, first Black executive director of the Gifford Foundation; and

WHEREAS, It is imperative of this Legislative Body to recognize those individuals who have contributed substantially to the progress, advancement, and diversity of the State of New York and the Nation at large, who paved the way for the future success of all residents; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to honor the Black history trailblazers of New York State's Cayuga and Onondaga Counties in in conjunction with the observance of the 100th

Anniversary of Black History Month in February, 2026.