

BY: Senator STEWART-COUSINS

COMMEMORATING the 55th Anniversary of Bloody Sunday and the Selma-to-Montgomery march across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama, which served as a catalyst for passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act

WHEREAS, The Selma to Montgomery march was part of a series of civil rights protests that occurred in 1965 in Alabama, a state which was deeply entrenched racist policies; and

WHEREAS, In March of that year, in an effort to register black voters in the South, protesters marching the 54-mile route from Selma to the state capital of Montgomery were confronted with deadly violence from local authorities and white vigilante groups; and

WHEREAS, As the world watched, the protesters under the protection of federalized National Guard troops finally achieved their goal, walking around the clock for three days to reach Montgomery, Alabama; the historic march, and Martin Luther King, Jr.'s participation in it, raised awareness of the difficulties faced by black voters, and the need for a national Voting Rights Act; and

WHEREAS, Even after the Civil Rights Act of 1964 forbade discrimination in voting on the basis of race, efforts by civil rights organizations such as the Southern Christian Leadership Council (SCLC) and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) to register black voters were met with fierce resistance in southern states such as Alabama; and

WHEREAS, On March 17, 1965, even as the Selma-to-Montgomery marchers fought for the right to carry out their protest, President Lyndon Johnson addressed a joint session of Congress, calling for federal voting rights legislation to protect African Americans from barriers that prevented them from voting; and

WHEREAS, That August, Congress passed the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which guaranteed the right to vote, first awarded by the 15th Amendment, to all African Americans; and

WHEREAS, Specifically, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 banned literacy tests as a requirement for voting, mandated federal oversight of voter registration in areas where tests had previously been used and gave the U.S. attorney general the duty of challenging the use of poll taxes for state and local elections; and

WHEREAS, Along with the Civil Rights Act, the Voting Rights Act was one of the most expansive pieces of civil rights legislation in American history; it greatly reduced the disparity between black and white voters in the United States and allowed greater numbers of African Americans to participate in politics and government at the local, state and national

level; and

WHEREAS, On March 7, 2015, marchers walked over the Brooklyn Bridge in solidarity with the 50th Anniversary of Bloody Sunday and the Selma-to-Montgomery march across the Edmund Pettus Bridge; the Selma is Everywhere march honored those who fought and continue to fight for social injustice and to remind all United States citizens to never forget the pain which was endured in the movement to attain basic civil rights; and

WHEREAS, To commemorate the 55th Anniversary of Bloody Sunday and the historic march, a myriad of events were held from Selma to New York, and across this great Nation to remember and recall that pivotal day which forever changed the lives of each and every American citizen; one such event included the Manhattan kick off of the nationwide tour of Turning 15 on the Road to Freedom, a musical filled with songs telling the story of Lynday Blacmon Lowery, the youngest child to walk all the way from Selma to Montgomery; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to commemorate the 55th Anniversary of Bloody Sunday and the Selma-to-Montgomery march across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama, which served as a catalyst for passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act; and be it further

RESOLVED, That a copy of this Resolution, suitably engrossed, be transmitted to Hazel N. Dukes, President, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), New York State Conference.