

Senate Resolution No. 558

BY: Senator SEPULVEDA

MEMORIALIZING Governor Kathy Hochul to proclaim
March 22, 2023, as Puerto Rican Emancipation Day in
the State of New York

WHEREAS, The Island of Puerto Rico annually observes and celebrates their emancipation of African slaves on March 22, 1873, which began under the sovereign rule of Spain; and

WHEREAS, The first European to visit the island was Christopher Columbus in November 1493, and claimed Puerto Rico as an important colony of the Spanish Empire; and

WHEREAS, Given its abundance of minerals, precious metals and agriculture, the Spaniards began to exploit Puerto Rico's natural resources by enslaving the Tainos, the indigenous habitants of the Island; and

WHEREAS, Eventually, the Spanish conquerors encountered a labor shortage because European diseases were spread throughout the island and decimated the local Taino populations; and

WHEREAS, In 1517, the Spanish Crown authorized the importation of African slaves to Puerto Rico to address the labor shortage, and permitted its subjects to import 12 slaves each, thereby beginning the slave trade in their colonies; and

WHEREAS, The early use of slaves in Puerto Rico was in mining gold, but once the mining ceased, demand for slaves was driven by sugar plantations; under the Caribbean sun, these slaves toiled from dusk to dawn; and

WHEREAS, Soon thereafter, these abhorrent work conditions led to 20 violent revolts which left many slaves dead or seriously injured; and

WHEREAS, Through the efforts of abolitionists such as Ramon Emeterio Betances, Segundo Ruiz Belvis, Jose Julian Acosta, Francisco Mariano Acosta and Julio L. de Vizcarrondo, and 10 years after President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation in the United States, 356 years of African slavery in Puerto Rico was abolished; and

WHEREAS, On March 22, 1873, the Spanish National Assembly abolished slavery in Puerto Rico, however, the victory was bittersweet; the slaves had to buy their own freedom, at whatever price was set by their last masters; consequently, the former slaves had to work for another three years for their former masters as compensation; and

WHEREAS, Today, African cultural is an integral part of the Puerto Rican Community in all aspects of education, art, literature, music, and food; and

WHEREAS, With close to one million Puerto Rican residents in New York State, spanning from Buffalo to New York City, "La Isla del Encanto" ("The Island of Enchantment") remains a constitutive sibling of our home state; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to memorialize Governor Kathy Hochul to proclaim March 22, 2023, as Puerto Rican Emancipation Day in the State of New York; and it be further

RESOLVED, That copies of this Resolution, suitably engrossed, be transmitted to The Honorable Kathy Hochul, Governor of the State of New York; The Honorable Pedro Pierluisi, Governor of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico; the New York Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic and Asian Legislative Caucus; and the Puerto Rican/Hispanic Task Force.