Assembly Resolution No. 964

BY: M. of A. Buttenschon

HONORING the life and legacy of Dr. Mary Edwards Walker in conjunction with the March 2024 observance of Women's History Month

WHEREAS, It is the sense of this Legislative Body to acknowledge and celebrate individuals and events of historic significance which add vitality, sensitivity, understanding and inspiration to the diversity and value of the people of this great Empire State; and

WHEREAS, Attendant to such concern and in full accord with its long-standing traditions, this Legislative Body is justly proud to honor the life and legacy of Dr. Mary Edwards Walker in conjunction with the March 2024 observance of Women's History Month; and

WHEREAS, An American feminist, suffragist, suspected spy, prisoner of war and surgeon, Dr. Mary Edwards Walker remains the only women ever to receive the Medal of Honor, which she was awarded for her service during the Civil War; and

WHEREAS, Born in Oswego, New York, in 1832, Mary Walker was the fifth daughter of abolitionists Alvah and Vesta Whitcomb Walker who encouraged her to think freely; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Mary Edwards Walker graduated from Syracuse Medical College in 1855, and set up her own medical practice in Rome, New York, shortly thereafter; and

WHEREAS, In 1860, Dr. Mary Edwards Walker briefly attended Bowen Collegiate Institute in Hopkinton, Iowa, but was swiftly suspended from the college for refusing to resign from the school's all-male debate team; and

WHEREAS, At the onset of the Civil War, Dr. Mary Edwards Walker traveled to Washington to join the Union Army; she was denied a commission as a medical officer, but served anyway as an unpaid volunteer surgeon at the U.S. Patent Office Hospital in Washington; and

WHEREAS, In 1862, Dr. Mary Edwards Walker worked as an unpaid field surgeon near the front lines at Fredericksburg and Chattanooga; in September of the following year, she became the first female U.S. Army surgeon following her commission as a "Contract Acting Assistant Surgeon" by the Army of the Cumberland; and

WHEREAS, While serving as an assistant surgeon with the 52nd Ohio Infantry, Dr. Mary Edwards Walker routinely crossed the lines to treat civilians; on one such foray in 1864, she was detained by Confederate troops and arrested for suspicion of spying; she was eventually freed in a prisoner exchange; and

WHEREAS, During the remainder of the war, Dr. Mary Edwards Walker

served at the Louisville Women's Prison Hospital and at an orphan asylum in Clarksville, Tennessee; and

WHEREAS, Upon the completion of her valiant military service, Dr. Mary Edwards Walker was awarded a disability pension for muscular atrophy which she suffered while in prison in Castle Thunder; based on the recommendation of Major Generals Sherman and Thomas, President Andrew Johnson signed a bill on November 11, 1865, to present her with the Medal of Honor for Meritorious Service; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Mary Edwards Walker was a fierce suffrage advocate, testifying before Congress on the issue multiple times and engaging in efforts of civil disobedience; in her later years, she opened her home to those who were also ostracized, harassed, and arrested for not conforming to traditional ideas of how people should dress; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Mary Edwards Walker died at her home on February 21, 1919; she was laid to rest in a black suit at Rural Cemetery in Oswego, New York; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Mary Edwards Walker was inducted into the National Women'sHall of Fame in 2000; she also had a Liberty ship named after her in World War II, called the SS Mary Walke; furthermore, in 2012, her hometown unveiled a 900-pound bronze statue in honor of her contributions and advocacy on behalf of women; and

WHEREAS, This Legislative Body recognizes that New York State is the home to countless women such as Dr. Mary Edwards Walker who are strong and colorful threads, vital to the fabric of our rich heritage, who have contributed, and continue to add to the advancement of our culture through their traditional and non-traditional roles in society; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to honor the life and legacy of Dr. Mary Edwards Walker in conjunction with the observance of Women's History Month.