
THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF PENNSYLVANIA

HOUSE RESOLUTION

No. 157 Session of
2021

INTRODUCED BY RABB, HILL-EVANS, T. DAVIS, MERSKI, SCHLOSSBERG,
SANCHEZ, D. WILLIAMS AND DELLOSO, NOVEMBER 23, 2021

REFERRED TO COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT, NOVEMBER 23, 2021

A CONCURRENT RESOLUTION

1 Honoring the 200th anniversary of the introduction of the Act
2 for the Entire Abolition of Slavery in Pennsylvania.

3 WHEREAS, Pennsylvania was the first State to enact gradual
4 abolition of slavery nearly a century after the Germantown
5 Quaker petition against slavery in 1688; and

6 WHEREAS, In 1780, Pennsylvania passed the Act for the Gradual
7 Abolition of Slavery which was the first legislative enactment
8 of its kind in the United States of America, however, it would
9 go on to be known as the most conservative of abolition laws
10 throughout the country; and

11 WHEREAS, Although the passage of the Act for the Gradual
12 Abolition of Slavery established a path toward emancipation for
13 some enslaved Black women, men and children in this
14 Commonwealth, the act granted few enslaved individuals the
15 immediate freedom they deserved; and

16 WHEREAS, The new law abolished what would later be referred
17 to as "hereditary lifetime slavery," yet permitted continued
18 enslavement, so long as enslaved people of African descent, born

1 before the date of enactment, were registered with their county
2 clerk, and those who were not registered were to be free; and

3 WHEREAS, This provision still allowed White residents of this
4 Commonwealth the ability to buy and sell enslaved Black
5 individuals who were registered; and

6 WHEREAS, The act specified that every child born to a duly
7 registered enslaved woman in Pennsylvania would be free upon
8 reaching the age of 28, however some Pennsylvanians took
9 advantage of the law by registering Black children as young as
10 five weeks old in an effort to perpetuate enslavement; and

11 WHEREAS, The provisions of gradual abolition legally codified
12 a class of people in this Commonwealth who were "unfree" through
13 the establishment of what would later be referred to as "term
14 slavery"; and

15 WHEREAS, The passage of this act was one of many instances
16 where the General Assembly surrendered its responsibility to
17 fully protect every single individual in Pennsylvania; and

18 WHEREAS, Forty years later, State Senator Samuel Breck, an
19 antislavery Federalist from Philadelphia, who was an ally of the
20 Pennsylvania Abolition Society, advocated for total abolition;
21 and

22 WHEREAS, Senator Breck believed a more aggressive abolition
23 policy needed to be enacted in this Commonwealth; and

24 WHEREAS, On January 20, 1821, Senator Breck introduced the
25 Act for the Entire Abolition of Slavery in Pennsylvania, which
26 would have immediately abolished slavery and freed every
27 enslaved person in Pennsylvania; and

28 WHEREAS, The advancement of the Act for the Entire Abolition
29 of Slavery in Pennsylvania was cut short, as a motion to
30 postpone the bill indefinitely succeeded by a vote of 14 to 13

1 on March 2, 1821; and

2 WHEREAS, On this day, the Pennsylvania General Assembly once
3 again abdicated its responsibility to protect all Pennsylvania
4 citizens by not abolishing slavery; and

5 WHEREAS, The indefinite postponement of the Act for the
6 Entire Abolition of Slavery in Pennsylvania was a clear example
7 of the Pennsylvania General Assembly's negligence that so
8 devastatingly impacted Black people for generations; and

9 WHEREAS, By 1850, slavery was, as the 1780 General Assembly
10 intended, gradually abolished in Pennsylvania; and

11 WHEREAS, However, the failure of the General Assembly to
12 fully eradicate slavery in this Commonwealth in 1780 and 1821
13 allowed racial disparities to occur in every facet of life for
14 Black Pennsylvanians, including areas such as health care,
15 education and incarceration, which have severely impacted their
16 livelihoods over the course of the past 200 years; and

17 WHEREAS, It is far past time that the people of Pennsylvania
18 and our General Assembly look at our Commonwealth's history with
19 a racial equity lens and educate ourselves on the missed
20 opportunities to eradicate racial disparities; therefore be it

21 RESOLVED (the Senate concurring), That the General Assembly
22 honor the 200th anniversary of the introduction of the Act for
23 the Entire Abolition of Slavery in Pennsylvania.