A RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, Ona Maria Judge Staines resided within this Commonwealth from 1790 to 1796 and was brought to the city of Philadelphia as an enslaved maid to George and Martha Washington; and

WHEREAS, Ms. Judge is one of the most understudied fugitive slaves in the United States who, at 22 years of age, literally stole herself from the Washington household; and

WHEREAS, In her indefatigable quest for unconditional freedom, Ms. Judge forced the first President of the United States to reveal his personal investment as an enslaver; and

WHEREAS, Ms. Judge, as a fugitive, tested President Washington's will and reputation; and

WHEREAS, Ms. Judge was born around 1773 on George Washington's Mount Vernon estate to an enslaved woman and a white indentured servant; and

WHEREAS, While Ms. Judge's father found his way out of

1. Honoring the life and legacy of Ona Maria Judge Staines.
temporary bondage, her mother did not; and
WHEREAS, At 10 years of age, Ms. Judge began her training as
a seamstress and spinner, eventually becoming Martha
Washington's most prized and valued enslaved woman; and
WHEREAS, When George Washington was elected President of the
United States in 1789, Ms. Judge, who was then 16 years of age,
was among the handful of enslaved men and women chosen to travel
with the Washington household to New York City, the site of the
nation's first capital; and
WHEREAS, When the nation's capital moved to Philadelphia, Ms.
Judge was taken to the City of Brotherly Love to continue
serving her owners, but it was also in Philadelphia that she
encountered Black Freedom; and
WHEREAS, Ms. Judge was never kept in Pennsylvania for longer
than six months at a time to avoid establishing legal residency,
because Pennsylvania law, under the Gradual Abolition Act of
1780, would have granted Ms. Judge her freedom from slavery; and
WHEREAS, When Ms. Judge learned that she was to be given away
as a wedding gift to Martha Washington's granddaughter, Ms.
Judge made a daring decision to escape with help from the Free
Black community of Philadelphia; and
WHEREAS, On May 21, 1796, Ms. Judge left the home of George
and Martha Washington while they were eating supper; and
WHEREAS, Although Ms. Judge was forced to live as a fugitive
for nearly 50 years in New Hampshire, this brave woman told her
story to two abolitionist newspapers; and
WHEREAS, Ms. Judge lived a difficult life trapped in
poverty's web, but she never regretted her decision to flee the
most powerful family in the United States; and
WHEREAS, Although Ms. Judge died on February 25, 1848, her
story will never be forgotten; and
WHEREAS, Ms. Judge's story is significant because it reminds us of the power of protest, the never-ending search for liberty and the untold number of Africans who were kidnapped, tortured and forced to face the degradation of the auction block; and
WHEREAS, Ms. Judge was caught in the web of human trafficking that existed within America for hundreds of years and, like millions of others, she survived; and
WHEREAS, Ms. Judge is an American hero who was an enslaved girl born at Mount Vernon, but once she was exposed to Black Freedom in Pennsylvania, she was compelled to pursue freedom at any cost; and
WHEREAS, Ms. Judge was a woman who found the courage to defy the President of the United States and possessed the wit to find allies, escape, outmaneuver, run and survive; and
WHEREAS, Ms. Judge's story is the only existing account of a fugitive once held by George and Martha Washington, and her life exposes the sting of slavery and the drive of defiance; and
WHEREAS, Ms. Judge fought for what she believed to be her right: freedom; therefore be it
RESOLVED, That the House of Representatives honor the life and legacy of Ona Maria Judge Staines; and be it further
RESOLVED, That the House of Representatives formally recognize Ona Maria Judge Staines, as one of Pennsylvania's most courageous residents, and her unending struggle for freedom.