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THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF PENNSYLVANIA

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HOUSE RESOLUTION

No. 285 Session of  
2017

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INTRODUCED BY RABB, DEAN, J. HARRIS, CALTAGIRONE, FREEMAN,  
READSHAW, MILLARD, DIGIROLAMO, PASHINSKI, SOLOMON, D. COSTA,  
BULLOCK, DAVIDSON, WARREN, V. BROWN, NEILSON, ROZZI AND  
McCLINTON, JUNE 22, 2017

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REFERRED TO COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT, JUNE 22, 2017

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A RESOLUTION

1 Honoring the life and legacy of Paul Leroy Robeson, civil rights  
2 activist, lawyer, thespian, athlete and entertainer.

3 WHEREAS, On April 9, 1898, Paul Leroy Robeson was born the  
4 youngest of five children to Reverend William Drew and Anna  
5 Louisa Robeson in Princeton, New Jersey; and

6 WHEREAS, Mr. Robeson's upbringing was that of a very unique  
7 and cultured one, as his father had managed to escape slavery  
8 and graduate from Lincoln University before going on to become a  
9 Presbyterian minister, and his mother was a member of the  
10 distinguished Bustill family, a renowned abolitionist Quaker  
11 family out of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; and

12 WHEREAS, Despite losing his mother at six years of age, Mr.  
13 Robeson and his family moved to Somerville, New Jersey, where he  
14 spent the remaining period of his formative years learning the  
15 value of hard work from his father and expanding his personal,  
16 recreational and social horizons; and

17 WHEREAS, Regarded as a studious and distinguished student, at

1 seventeen years of age, Mr. Robeson was awarded an academic  
2 scholarship to Rutgers University where he was the third  
3 African-American student in the school's history; and

4 WHEREAS, Widely regarded for his athletic prowess during his  
5 time at Rutgers University, Mr. Robeson excelled in baseball,  
6 basketball and track and field; and

7 WHEREAS, Mr. Robeson was Rutgers University's first black  
8 football player and earned the honor of being a two-time All-  
9 American; and

10 WHEREAS, Mr. Robeson was posthumously inducted into the  
11 College Football Hall of Fame in 1995; and

12 WHEREAS, Mr. Robeson's academic record at Rutgers University  
13 was comprised of his induction into the Cap & Skull Senior Honor  
14 Society, the Phi Beta Kappa Honor Society and the duly bestowed  
15 title of Valedictorian at the time of his graduation in 1919;  
16 and

17 WHEREAS, Upon the completion of his undergraduate studies,  
18 Mr. Robeson played professional football while enrolled at  
19 Columbia University Law School, where he earned his law degree  
20 in 1923 and was admitted to the New York State Bar Association;  
21 and

22 WHEREAS, During his time at law school, he met and wed his  
23 loving wife Eslanda Cardozo Goode, the union of which produced  
24 his only child, Paul Robeson, Jr.; and

25 WHEREAS, As a result of widespread discrimination and  
26 recurring acts of racism that he encountered in the legal field,  
27 Mr. Robeson abruptly ended his career as a lawyer and chose to  
28 refocus his attention and artistic talents toward the spheres of  
29 theater, music, African culture and African-American history;  
30 and

1       WHEREAS, In 1924, Mr. Robeson landed the lead role in the  
2 stage play *All God's Chillun Got Wings* (1924) and then  
3 subsequently earned starring roles in his debut film, *Body and*  
4 *Soul* (1925), and his follow-up film, *The Emperor Jones* (1933);  
5 and

6       WHEREAS, Mr. Robeson's early body of work cultivated the  
7 launching pad that gave rise to national and international  
8 acclaim as he frequently performed domestically and abroad; and

9       WHEREAS, Mr. Robeson also starred in internationally  
10 acclaimed stage presentations and films such as *Show Boat*  
11 (1928), *Toussaint L'Ouverture* (1934), *Stevedore* (1935), *Song of*  
12 *Freedom* (1936) and *Proud Valley* (1939), and amassed an  
13 extraordinary career in the entertainment industry as a world-  
14 renowned concert singer, thespian and orator; and

15       WHEREAS, Mr. Robeson's most culturally significant and  
16 impactful performance as an actor was in his role as Othello in  
17 the Shakespearean Broadway play; and

18       WHEREAS, Mr. Robeson was the first black actor to assume that  
19 role, and the Broadway production ran for a remarkable 296  
20 performances from 1943 to 1944; and

21       WHEREAS, Not one to rest on his laurels or to lose sight of  
22 the harrowing plight of black Americans and other subjugated  
23 populations across the world, Mr. Robeson effectively utilized  
24 his popularity, talents, including his ability to speak more  
25 than a dozen different languages, and platform to advocate for  
26 justice and peace in response to many military and political  
27 conflicts that included, but were not limited to, the Italo-  
28 Ethiopian War (1935), the Spanish Civil War (1936), World War II  
29 (1939) and the era of America's oppressive and discriminatory  
30 Jim Crow policies; and

1       WHEREAS, In the face of strident criticism of his advocacy  
2 efforts and at the expense of his career and livelihood, Mr.  
3 Robeson remained steadfast in serving as a national symbol for  
4 justice and a veritable champion of the world's persecuted,  
5 disenfranchised and voiceless citizenry; and

6       WHEREAS, During the twilight of Mr. Robeson's illustrious  
7 career, he relocated to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, the City of  
8 Brotherly Love and Sisterly Affection, where he resided until  
9 the date of his death on January 23, 1976; and

10       WHEREAS, As an homage to the late Mr. Robeson's extraordinary  
11 impact on the world, especially relating to the plight of black  
12 Americans, many institutions within the City of Philadelphia  
13 started to bear the name of the late human rights leader and  
14 scholar, including the Paul Robeson High School for Human  
15 Services; and

16       WHEREAS, The Paul Robeson House, former home of the late Mr.  
17 Robeson was converted into a museum to honor his life, legacy,  
18 philosophy and historical significance and was designated as a  
19 National Historical Landmark in the National Register of  
20 Historic Places in 1991; and

21       WHEREAS, April 9, 1998, marked the centennial of Mr.  
22 Robeson's birth, the occasion procured his posthumously  
23 conferred Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award which was observed  
24 by innumerable individuals, organizations and institutions in  
25 the City of Philadelphia and all across the world; and

26       WHEREAS, April 9, 2017, marks what would have been the 119th  
27 birthday of Paul Leroy Robeson and 41 years since the date of  
28 his death; therefore be it

29       RESOLVED, That the House of Representatives recognize the  
30 milestones, achievements and legacy of one of our nation's last

1 Renaissance men, the incomparable Paul Leroy Robeson; and be it  
2 further

3       RESOLVED, That the House of Representatives honor Mr.  
4 Robeson's extraordinary and far-reaching impact on our national  
5 and global landscape.