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THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF PENNSYLVANIA

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HOUSE RESOLUTION

No. 982 Session of  
2020

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INTRODUCED BY RABB, MURT, KINSEY, HARRIS, HILL-EVANS, WEBSTER,  
KORTZ, LEE, READSHAW, NEILSON, McCLINTON, MARKOSEK, MULLINS,  
DAWKINS, ROZZI AND MADDEN, AUGUST 31, 2020

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REFERRED TO COMMITTEE ON RULES, AUGUST 31, 2020

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A RESOLUTION

1 Honoring the life and legacy of Ona Maria Judge Staines.

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

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

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

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

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

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

1 temporary bondage, her mother did not; and

2 WHEREAS, At 10 years of age, Ms. Judge began her training as  
3 a seamstress and spinner, eventually becoming Martha  
4 Washington's most prized and valued enslaved woman; and

5 WHEREAS, When George Washington was elected President of the  
6 United States in 1789, Ms. Judge, who was then 16 years of age,  
7 was among the handful of enslaved men and women chosen to travel  
8 with the Washington household to New York City, the site of the  
9 nation's first capital; and

10 WHEREAS, When the nation's capital moved to Philadelphia, Ms.  
11 Judge was taken to the City of Brotherly Love to continue  
12 serving her owners, but it was also in Philadelphia that she  
13 encountered Black Freedom; and

14 WHEREAS, Ms. Judge was never kept in Pennsylvania for longer  
15 than six months at a time to avoid establishing legal residency,  
16 because Pennsylvania law, under the Gradual Abolition Act of  
17 1780, would have granted Ms. Judge her freedom from slavery; and

18 WHEREAS, When Ms. Judge learned that she was to be given away  
19 as a wedding gift to Martha Washington's granddaughter, Ms.  
20 Judge made a daring decision to escape with help from the Free  
21 Black community of Philadelphia; and

22 WHEREAS, On May 21, 1796, Ms. Judge left the home of George  
23 and Martha Washington while they were eating supper; and

24 WHEREAS, Although Ms. Judge was forced to live as a fugitive  
25 for nearly 50 years in New Hampshire, this brave woman told her  
26 story to two abolitionist newspapers; and

27 WHEREAS, Ms. Judge lived a difficult life trapped in  
28 poverty's web, but she never regretted her decision to flee the  
29 most powerful family in the United States; and

30 WHEREAS, Although Ms. Judge died on February 25, 1848, her

1 story will never be forgotten; and

2 WHEREAS, Ms. Judge's story is significant because it reminds  
3 us of the power of protest, the never-ending search for liberty  
4 and the untold number of Africans who were kidnapped, tortured  
5 and forced to face the degradation of the auction block; and

6 WHEREAS, Ms. Judge was caught in the web of human trafficking  
7 that existed within America for hundreds of years and, like  
8 millions of others, she survived; and

9 WHEREAS, Ms. Judge is an American hero who was an enslaved  
10 girl born at Mount Vernon, but once she was exposed to Black  
11 Freedom in Pennsylvania, she was compelled to pursue freedom at  
12 any cost; and

13 WHEREAS, Ms. Judge was a woman who found the courage to defy  
14 the President of the United States and possessed the wit to find  
15 allies, escape, outmaneuver, run and survive; and

16 WHEREAS, Ms. Judge's story is the only existing account of a  
17 fugitive once held by George and Martha Washington, and her life  
18 exposes the sting of slavery and the drive of defiance; and

19 WHEREAS, Ms. Judge fought for what she believed to be her  
20 right: freedom; therefore be it

21 RESOLVED, That the House of Representatives honor the life  
22 and legacy of Ona Maria Judge Staines; and be it further

23 RESOLVED, That the House of Representatives formally  
24 recognize Ona Maria Judge Staines, as one of Pennsylvania's most  
25 courageous residents, and her unending struggle for freedom.