
THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF PENNSYLVANIA

HOUSE RESOLUTION

No. 159 Session of
2021

INTRODUCED BY RABB, HILL-EVANS AND BURGOS, DECEMBER 1, 2021

REFERRED TO COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT, DECEMBER 1, 2021

A CONCURRENT RESOLUTION

1 Recognizing November 25, 2021, as the "National Day of Mourning"
2 in Pennsylvania.

3 WHEREAS, The "National Day of Mourning" has been celebrated
4 on the United States' Thanksgiving holiday since 1970 by
5 Indigenous people and their allies to honor Indigenous ancestors
6 and Native resilience; and

7 WHEREAS, This Commonwealth is home to the land and the rich
8 cultural history of many Indigenous peoples, including the Erie,
9 Iroquois, Lenape, Munsee, Nanticoke, Shawnee and Susquehannock,
10 with more than 12,000 Native peoples living in Pennsylvania
11 today; and

12 WHEREAS, The Thanksgiving holiday, since its inception, has
13 been a celebration of Pilgrims and other European settlers
14 taking possession of Indigenous lands in North America; and

15 WHEREAS, The actions of European settlers stemmed from an
16 idea of cultural superiority which, for centuries, served as the
17 rationale for murdering, displacing and dehumanizing Indigenous
18 peoples in the United States, where the right to personal

liberty is supposed to be guaranteed; and

WHEREAS, The notion of cultural superiority so deeply infiltrated this Commonwealth that a group of White men from what is now the greater Harrisburg area viciously murdered many peaceful Conestoga men, women and children in December 1763, justifying their crimes on unbased claims that the Conestoga had provided aid and intelligence to other hostile groups; and

WHEREAS, In 1782, a group of White militiamen from Pennsylvania slaughtered approximately 90 unarmed Christian Native people in the mission settlement of Gnadenhutten, Ohio, after making false claims about the victims' role in raids on frontier settlements, fueled by the racist and unjust ideologies that were all too pervasive among Pennsylvanians and other American colonists at the time; and

WHEREAS, This Commonwealth witnessed the shameful treatment of Native peoples throughout its history, especially at the Carlisle Indian Industrial School, the first boarding school for Native children run by the Federal Government, in an attempt to exterminate Native culture; and

WHEREAS, The Carlisle Indian Industrial School was the model by which hundreds of other Native boarding schools were created in order to force Whiteness and Americanization on Indigenous children from across the nation; and

WHEREAS, Through all 39 years of the Carlisle Indian Industrial School's operation, until its closing in 1918, this Commonwealth was complacent in the acts of cultural erasure, religious indoctrination and physical and emotional abuse that occurred within its walls; and

WHEREAS, Of the thousands of Native children sent to these federally run schools, many never returned to their families,

1 including the 186 who lie in graves at the Carlisle Indian
2 Industrial School after dying of disease, neglect or abuse; and

3 WHEREAS, The residents of this Commonwealth have the
4 responsibility to confront the history of oppression toward
5 Indigenous peoples and proactively recognize that the
6 Thanksgiving holiday, for many, is a reminder of the
7 introduction of colonization in North America and of the ensuing
8 genocide of millions of Native peoples, the theft of Native
9 lands and the condemnation of Native cultures; and

10 WHEREAS, In 1970, at a Thanksgiving celebration in Plymouth,
11 Massachusetts, an Aquinnah Wampanoag tribal leader who was
12 scheduled to speak was asked to censor his remarks after
13 compiling a speech that recognized the theft of Indigenous land,
14 graves and belongings committed by the Pilgrims after their
15 arrival in North America; and

16 WHEREAS, This Aquinnah Wampanoag tribal leader, Wamsutta
17 Frank James, withdrew as a speaker at the Thanksgiving event,
18 refusing to be silenced; and

19 WHEREAS, From this act of protest came a counter-
20 commemoration, now known as the "National Day of Mourning,"
21 which is recognized by both Native and nonnative people to
22 consider Thanksgiving from the perspective of Indigenous peoples
23 and draw attention to the genocide of Native people, theft of
24 their lands and assault on their culture; and

25 WHEREAS, Today, hundreds of years after the cross-cultural
26 feast many refer to as the "first Thanksgiving," Indigenous
27 peoples across the nation continue to fight for their rights and
28 spend the Thanksgiving holiday in mourning for the loss of
29 Indigenous life and culture, in protest against the racism and
30 oppression experienced by Indigenous peoples across the globe

1 and in celebration of the culture and resiliency of Native
2 people; therefore be it

3 RESOLVED (the Senate concurring), That the General Assembly
4 recognize November 25, 2021, as the "National Day of Mourning"
5 in Pennsylvania; and be it further

6 RESOLVED, That the General Assembly recognize that racist
7 policies and attitudes toward Indigenous peoples exhibited
8 within this Commonwealth and beyond are a result of the
9 misguided and reprehensible ways that the colonization,
10 otherization and exploitation of people of color across the
11 globe have taken place under the justification of White European
12 cultural superiority; and be it further

13 RESOLVED, That the General Assembly call on all
14 Pennsylvanians to spend this Thanksgiving holiday in recognition
15 of the European colonists' brutal mistreatment of Native people
16 from the moment they arrived in North America; and be it further

17 RESOLVED, That the General Assembly recognize the resiliency
18 of Native peoples in the face of severe oppression at the hand
19 of White colonizers in this Commonwealth and across the nation,
20 and that the Thanksgiving holiday must be a reminder of the full
21 history of our nation; a history that includes tragedy,
22 inequality and injustice, and that the holiday should provide an
23 opportunity for all Pennsylvanians to join in our continued
24 fight toward justice and harmony today.