
THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF PENNSYLVANIA

HOUSE BILL

No. 2505 Session of
2024

INTRODUCED BY D. WILLIAMS, SAPPEY, T. DAVIS, HILL-EVANS,
McNEILL, DONAHUE, VENKAT, PIELLI, HOWARD, GUENST, PROBST,
SCHLOSSBERG, GIRAL, KINSEY, HANBIDGE, KHAN, HADDOCK, SANCHEZ,
MAYES, CEPEDA-FREYTIZ, CURRY, OTTEN, KIM, BOROWSKI, CIRESI,
DALEY, O'MARA AND BOYD, JULY 23, 2024

REFERRED TO COMMITTEE ON TOURISM AND ECONOMIC AND RECREATIONAL
DEVELOPMENT, JULY 23, 2024

AN ACT

1 Designating the month of September of each year as
2 "International Underground Railroad Month" in this
3 Commonwealth.

4 The General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
5 hereby enacts as follows:

6 Section 1. Short title.

7 This act shall be known and may be cited as the Underground
8 Railroad Month Designation Act.

9 Section 2. Legislative findings and declarations.

10 The General Assembly finds and declares as follows:

11 (1) Freedom seekers courageously traversed miles of the
12 Underground Railroad while facing unimaginable hardship and
13 trauma.

14 (2) They risked their lives to escape a system of
15 slavery that was commercialized, racialized and inherited.

16 (3) Through the trans-Atlantic slave trade, people were

1 forcefully abducted from their homes, enslaved in the
2 American colonies and exploited to work in the production of
3 crops, such as tobacco and cotton.

4 (4) The Underground Railroad covertly operated as a
5 network of places, routes and people that assisted African
6 Americans who were enslaved to escape to freedom.

7 (5) The term Underground Railroad was used
8 metaphorically as "conductors," which included a racially
9 diverse group of abolitionists, transported and guided
10 "passengers" traveling along the routes.

11 (6) "Station masters" hid the freedom seekers at
12 "stations" which included homes, barns, churches and
13 businesses.

14 (7) Freedom seekers who arrived at the safe houses were
15 referred to as "cargo."

16 (8) The Underground Railroad traced across this
17 Commonwealth in a clandestine network that helped African
18 Americans realize freedom in this Commonwealth and elsewhere.

19 (9) This Commonwealth was a strategic and historic
20 location of freedom through the Underground Railroad.

21 (10) Sites associated with the Underground Railroad can
22 be found in every county in this Commonwealth.

23 (11) The freedom seekers and those who assisted them in
24 running the Underground Railroad were integral to the freedom
25 and advancement of African Americans in the past, as well as
26 today.

27 (12) Under life-threatening circumstances, freedom
28 seekers equipped themselves with literacy, knowledge of
29 astronomy and the natural world and many self-taught skills
30 that proved vital to their fight for freedom.

1 (13) Although the Commonwealth passed a law in 1780 that
2 gradually eliminated slavery, the existing 6,000 enslaved
3 people in this Commonwealth remained enslaved and the
4 enslaved people's registered children would be enslaved until
5 their 28th birthdays.

6 (14) Although a person could no longer legally import
7 enslaved people, they could buy and sell those who had been
8 registered after 1780.

9 (15) Freedom seekers often banded together to raise
10 money to buy the freedom of their fellow freedom seekers.

11 (16) The Commonwealth continued to tolerate and profit
12 from the labor of enslaved people for decades and many
13 Commonwealth cities enacted legislation that restricted and
14 oppressed free people of color.

15 (17) Freedom seekers supported their families and
16 communities through the trades, retail, media, ranching,
17 mining and the legal and legislative fields.

18 (18) They further went on to serve in the Civil War and
19 play active roles in the abolitionist movement and women's
20 suffrage movement.

21 (19) The Underground Railroad was the first nonviolent
22 movement in our country's history, preceding by generations
23 the phrasing that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., popularized
24 during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s.

25 (20) The Underground Railroad is a historical
26 development that demonstrates to future generations the
27 American values of faith, commitment and national unity,
28 transcending narrow and sectarian interests for the greater
29 good.

30 (21) "International Underground Railroad Month" honors

1 those who sought freedom through the Underground Railroad and
2 provides an opportunity for an open dialogue that illuminates
3 the hopes that arise from freedom for all people.

4 Section 3. Designation.

5 The month of September of each year shall be designated as
6 "International Underground Railroad Month" in this Commonwealth.

7 Section 4. Construction.

8 Nothing in this act shall be construed as requiring an
9 employer to treat the month of September as a legal or official
10 holiday or to provide paid leave to an employee solely by virtue
11 of the month being designated under this act.

12 Section 5. Effective date.

13 This act shall take effect immediately.