
THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF PENNSYLVANIA

HOUSE RESOLUTION

No. 400 Session of
2019

INTRODUCED BY RABB, FREEMAN, DONATUCCI, HARRIS, KINSEY,
DIGIROLAMO, KORTZ, YOUNGBLOOD, MURT, SAMUELSON, CEPHAS,
McCLINTON, HILL-EVANS, PASHINSKI, DALEY, MARKOSEK, MULLINS,
NEILSON, CALTAGIRONE, SOLOMON, DAWKINS AND ROZZI,
JUNE 12, 2019

INTRODUCED AS NONCONTROVERSIAL RESOLUTION UNDER RULE 35,
JUNE 12, 2019

A RESOLUTION

1 Honoring the life and legacy of Octavius Valentine Catto, civil
2 rights activist, educator, military officer and baseball
3 player.

4 WHEREAS, Octavius Valentine Catto was born a free Black man
5 to the Reverend William T. Catto, a prominent Presbyterian
6 minister and former slave, and Sara Isabella Cain in Charleston,
7 South Carolina, on February 22, 1839; and

8 WHEREAS, At a young age, Mr. Catto's family moved north to
9 Philadelphia where he was afforded an excellent education,
10 attending Vaux Primary School and then Lombard Grammar School,
11 both segregated institutions; and

12 WHEREAS, Mr. Catto's family briefly relocated to Allentown,
13 New Jersey, where he attended the all-white Allentown Academy;
14 and

15 WHEREAS, Mr. Catto became a student at the Quaker-sponsored
16 Institute for Colored Youth, now Cheyney University, when his

1 family returned to Philadelphia where he excelled in his studies
2 and graduated as valedictorian in 1858; and

3 WHEREAS, Mr. Catto continued his education with postgraduate
4 studies in the classical languages in Washington, DC, and upon
5 his return to Philadelphia, accepted a faculty position at the
6 Institute for Colored Youth teaching literature, mathematics and
7 classical languages and serving as an assistant to principal and
8 prominent educator Ebenezer D. Bassett; and

9 WHEREAS, In response to the call for emergency troops
10 following the Confederate Army's invasion of Pennsylvania in
11 1863, Mr. Catto recruited one of the first volunteer companies,
12 the 5th Brigade of the Pennsylvania National Guard in which he
13 served as major and inspector general; and

14 WHEREAS, After his company was initially turned away, Mr.
15 Catto joined Frederick Douglass and other prominent Black
16 leaders in forming a Recruitment Committee and, with the
17 assistance of the Union League, raised 11 regiments of "Colored
18 Troops" who were trained at Camp William Penn before being sent
19 to the war front; and

20 WHEREAS, Throughout his life, Mr. Catto was active in
21 intellectual and political pursuits and served as a founding
22 member of the Banneker Literary Institute and the Pennsylvania
23 State Equal Rights League in October 1864; and

24 WHEREAS, Mr. Catto was a member of the Philadelphia Library
25 Company, the 4th Ward Black Political Club, the Franklin
26 Institute and other civic, literary, patriotic and political
27 groups; and

28 WHEREAS, Following the Civil War, Mr. Catto traveled
29 throughout the northern states speaking on behalf of the 15th
30 Amendment to the Constitution of the United States and

1 encouraging northern politicians to ratify the amendment and
2 guarantee African Americans the right to vote; and

3 WHEREAS, In 1866, Mr. Catto began using civil disobedience
4 and peaceful protesting tactics to bring attention to the
5 racially segregated public transportation network; and

6 WHEREAS, Mr. Catto's efforts led to the eventual integration
7 of Philadelphia's streetcars and the passage of Pennsylvania's
8 1867 "Bill of Rights" law that prohibited segregation on transit
9 systems across this Commonwealth; and

10 WHEREAS, Mr. Catto believed baseball to be another way in
11 which African Americans could display independence, skill and
12 equality; and

13 WHEREAS, With his childhood friend, Jacob White, Jr., Mr.
14 Catto formed Philadelphia's second Black baseball team, the
15 Philadelphia Pythians, of which he was a co-manager and player;
16 and

17 WHEREAS, After the ratification of the 15th Amendment in
18 1870, Mr. Catto educated Black citizens on the voting process
19 and encouraged them to vote, but many experienced intimidation
20 and violence leading up to the election as their inclusion
21 threatened to change the embedded political structure; and

22 WHEREAS, Mr. Catto was assassinated outside his home by a
23 political opponent on Election Day, October 10, 1871, alongside
24 other Blacks as they encouraged African Americans to vote; and

25 WHEREAS, The City of Philadelphia paid homage to Mr. Catto's
26 extraordinary impact to this Commonwealth, the world and African
27 Americans by unveiling a 12-foot bronze statue in his likeness
28 at City Hall called "A Quest for Parity," the city's first
29 memorial to an African American; therefore be it

30 RESOLVED, That the House of Representatives honor the life

1 and legacy of Octavius Valentine Catto, civil rights activist,
2 educator, military officer and baseball player; and be it
3 further

4 RESOLVED, That the House of Representatives remember Octavius
5 Valentine Catto as part of Black History Month and the American
6 civil rights story; and be it further

7 RESOLVED, That the House of Representative recognize the
8 milestones, achievements and legacy of Octavius Valentine
9 Catto's fight for social justice.