BPU# _____

SG 345
SR 374
TR 216
DR N
CR 33

House Copy OLS Copy Public Copy
For Official House Use

BILL NO. _____

Date of Intro. _____

Ref. _____

NOTE TO SPONSOR	Notify OLS if you require changes in this document. A revised copy for introduction will be prepared on the legislative computer system. Handwritten changes will not appear in the printed bill.

AN ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION commemorating consequential pieces of legislation enacted in this State between 1776 and 1826.

Commemorates consequential pieces of legislation enacted in this State between 1776 and 1826.

PRIME Sponsor _____ /

CO-Sponsor	District	CO-Sponsor	District

Same as _____ 24/25 Same as _____ 26/27

Suggested allocation:

DRAFT

AN ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION commemorating consequential pieces of legislation enacted in this State between 1776 and 1826.

WHEREAS, On July 2, 1776, two days before the Continental Congress adopted the Declaration of Independence, the Provincial Congress of New Jersey met in Burlington and adopted the first Constitution of the State of New Jersey, which established a framework for representative government that would guide the newly independent State; and

WHEREAS, The 1776 Constitution created a bicameral legislature consisting of a Legislative Council and a General Assembly and vested the power to make the laws of the State in these bodies meeting jointly as the State Legislature; and

WHEREAS, Following the adoption of this Constitution and the first free elections held for members of the Legislature in this State, the Legislature convened for the first session on August 27, 1776, in Nassau Hall at the College of New Jersey in Princeton, making it one of the oldest continuous legislative bodies in the United States; and

WHEREAS, The first Legislature faced the extraordinary challenge of establishing a functioning government while the State served as a principal battleground of the Revolutionary War, with legislators forced to relocate multiple times between Princeton, Burlington, Trenton, and other locations to avoid British occupation; and

WHEREAS, In the earliest legislative sessions, held between 1776 and 1783, the Legislature established the foundations of legislative procedure and enacted laws relevant for the time, including numerous wartime measures such as the raising of a militia for the common defense, supply requisitions to support the Continental Army, loyalty oath requirements for public officials and citizens, and legislation to confiscate property from those who remained loyal to the British Crown; and

WHEREAS, New Jersey's 1776 Constitution contained liberal suffrage provisions for its era, granting the right to vote to "all inhabitants" who met certain property requirements, which allowed unmarried women and free African Americans who met the property qualifications to exercise the franchise in New Jersey elections, making New Jersey unique among the original states in this regard; and

WHEREAS, However, in 1807, the Legislature passed "An Act to Regulate the Election of Members of the Legislative Council and General Assembly, Sheriffs and Coroners, in this State," which explicitly limited voting rights to "white male citizens" who met property or tax-paying requirements, thereby disenfranchising all women and all men of color who had previously exercised the right to vote under the more inclusive 1776 Constitution, representing a significant regression in democratic participation; and

WHEREAS, In 1804, the Legislature enacted "An Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery," representing a significant moral commitment to ending slavery in New Jersey, albeit through a gradual process that freed no enslaved person immediately but instead provided that

D R A F T

children born to enslaved mothers after July 4, 1804 would be freed after serving terms of apprenticeship, making New Jersey the last northern state to pass gradual emancipation legislation and the last northern state where slavery remained, as a small number of elderly enslaved persons were still held under the apprenticeship system into the 1860s; and

WHEREAS, While the legislators of that era did succumb to these moral failures, the Legislature did develop institutional frameworks that improved processes and paved the way for better legislation that would follow; and

WHEREAS, The Legislature established a State Treasury, a court system, and school districts, and provided for economic development initiatives, anti-poverty programs, and infrastructure projects that would transform New Jersey into an economic powerhouse for generations; and

WHEREAS, The Legislature also designated Trenton as the permanent capital of New Jersey, ending years of meeting in more sporadic locations and providing governmental stability by establishing a fixed seat of government centrally located and accessible to all the State's inhabitants; and

WHEREAS, Of particular significance, the New Jersey Legislature unanimously ratified the United States Constitution on December 18, 1787, making New Jersey the third state to do so, and became the first state to ratify the Bill of Rights, the first ten amendments to the United States Constitution, on November 20, 1789, setting the precedent for the State's commitment to fundamental civil liberties which we reaffirm today; and

WHEREAS, It is appropriate that, as we begin to commemorate the 250th anniversary of our State and our Nation's founding, the current State Legislature recognizes and reflects upon these consequential pieces of legislation and the complete historical record of the State's foundational period, acknowledging both the achievements and shortcomings of our legislative predecessors, and understanding that honest recognition of both historical progress and injustice provides essential perspective on the ongoing struggle to fulfill the promise of equal rights and representative government; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED *by the General Assembly of the State of New Jersey:*

1. This House commemorates the many consequential pieces of legislation enacted in this State between 1776 and 1826, commits to learning from both the achievements and shortcomings of legislative predecessors, and reaffirms a sacred commitment to work tirelessly for the betterment of this great State and for the people who have the tremendous honor to call New Jersey their home.

D R A F T

2. Copies of this resolution, as filed with the Secretary of State, shall be transmitted by the Clerk of the General Assembly to the Governor and the New Jersey Historical Commission.

STATEMENT

This Assembly resolution commemorates the many consequential pieces of legislation enacted in this State between 1776 and 1826, commits the General Assembly to learning from both the achievements and shortcomings of its legislative predecessors, and reaffirms a sacred commitment to work tirelessly for the betterment of this great State and for the people who have the tremendous honor to call New Jersey their home.

On July 2, 1776, two days before the Continental Congress adopted the Declaration of Independence, the Provincial Congress of New Jersey met in Burlington and adopted the first Constitution of the State of New Jersey, which established a framework for representative government that would guide the newly independent State. Following the adoption of this Constitution and the first free elections held for members of the Legislature in this State, the Legislature convened for the first session on August 27, 1776, in Nassau Hall at the College of New Jersey in Princeton, making it one of the oldest continuous legislative bodies in the United States.

The first Legislature faced the extraordinary challenge of establishing a functioning government while the State served as a principal battleground of the Revolutionary War, with legislators forced to relocate multiple times to avoid British occupation. In the earliest legislative sessions, held between 1776 and 1783, the Legislature established the foundations of legislative procedure and enacted laws relevant for the time, including numerous wartime measures such as the raising of a militia for the common defense, supply requisitions to support the Continental Army, loyalty oath requirements for public officials and citizens, and legislation to confiscate property from those who remained loyal to the British Crown.

New Jersey's 1776 Constitution contained liberal suffrage provisions for its era, granting the right to vote to "all inhabitants" who met certain property requirements, which allowed unmarried women and free African Americans who met the property qualifications to exercise the franchise in New Jersey elections, making New Jersey unique among the original states in this regard. However, in 1807, the Legislature passed "An Act to Regulate the Election of Members of the Legislative Council and General Assembly, Sheriffs and Coroners, in this State," which explicitly limited voting rights to "white male citizens" who met property or tax-paying requirements, thereby disenfranchising all women and all men of color who had previously exercised the right to vote under the

DRAFT

more inclusive 1776 Constitution, representing a significant regression in democratic participation.

In 1804, the Legislature enacted "An Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery," representing a significant moral commitment to ending slavery in New Jersey, albeit through a gradual process that freed no enslaved person immediately but instead provided that children born to enslaved mothers after July 4, 1804 would be freed after serving terms of apprenticeship, making New Jersey the last northern state to pass gradual emancipation legislation and the last northern state where slavery remained, as a small number of elderly enslaved persons were still held under the apprenticeship system into the 1860s.

While the legislators of that era did succumb to these moral failures, the Legislature did develop institutional frameworks that improved processes and paved the way for better legislation that would follow. The Legislature established a State Treasury, a court system, and school districts, and provided for economic development initiatives, anti-poverty programs, and infrastructure projects that would transform New Jersey into an economic powerhouse for generations. The Legislature also designated Trenton as the permanent capital of New Jersey, ending years of meeting in more sporadic locations and providing governmental stability by establishing a fixed seat of government centrally located and accessible to all the State's inhabitants.

Of particular significance, the New Jersey Legislature unanimously ratified the United States Constitution on December 18, 1787, making New Jersey the third state to do so, and became the first state to ratify the Bill of Rights, the first ten amendments to the United States Constitution, on November 20, 1789, setting the precedent for the State's commitment to fundamental civil liberties which we reaffirm today.

It is appropriate that, as we begin to commemorate the 250th anniversary of our State and our Nation's founding, the current State Legislature recognizes and reflects upon these consequential pieces of legislation and the complete historical record of the State's foundational period, acknowledging both the achievements and shortcomings of our legislative predecessors, and understanding that honest recognition of both historical progress and injustice provides essential perspective on the ongoing struggle to fulfill the promise of equal rights and representative government.

Commemorates consequential pieces of legislation enacted in this State between 1776 and 1826.

DRAFT