

Governor Markell Recognizes 150th Anniversary of 13th Amendment, Announces Effort with Legislature to Apologize for State's Role in Slavery

Joint Resolution to be introduced by General Assembly early next year would formally acknowledge, apologize for State's role

Wilmington, DE – Joined by state legislators, community advocates and local parishioners during a worship service at Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church, Governor Markell today recognized the 150th anniversary of the ratification of the 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution to legally abolish slavery.

“For generations, our country denied and actively contested a basic fact of humanity: that nothing about the color of one’s skin affects that person’s innate rights to freedom and dignity,” said Governor Markell. “We must publicly and candidly acknowledge the lasting damage of past sins – damage that continues to reverberate more than 150 years after the abolition of slavery.”

□Building on recent efforts to address historic injustices, including the recent issuance of a [pardon](#) for Underground Railroad conductor Samuel Burris, the Governor also announced his support of a joint resolution to officially condemn and apologize for Delaware’s role in slavery.

“The resolution being introduced today will do more than write a footnote into the history books that describe the atrocious conditions that some Delawareans inflicted upon people of

African descent,” said Governor Markell. “This marks an important moment in owning up to our responsibility to fix the long legacy of damage that continues to result in inequality and unfair obstacles for countless citizens because of their race.”

The House Joint Resolution (HJR) is sponsored by Representative Stephanie T. Bolden (D-Wilmington East) and Senate Majority Whip Margaret Rose Henry (D-Wilmington East) and will be introduced during legislative session early next year.

“Today we celebrate the ratification of the 13th Amendment and the voice it gave to those who were once voiceless, declaring for all time that no American would labor without reward,” said Rep. Bolden. “However, that act did not erase the memory of what our state did in the age before emancipation. For African Americans in Delaware, and for all Delawareans, we must join with other former slaveholding states in offering apologies for the inhumanity that was once lawful here.”

“Slavery is the darkest chapter of our nation’s history,” said Senator Henry. “And while the page has long been turned, the scars from the whippings, the bruises from the shackles, the tears from the torment can still be felt all these years later in the continued struggle against racism, prejudice and the power of the privileged. Who we are as a state and nation is shaped by our history – the good and the bad. And who we can be tomorrow is predicated upon our ability to show empathy for each other today. In my view, an apology for slavery is just that: an act of empathy that won’t undo the past, but will once and for all acknowledge the experience of so many Delawareans who still feel its harsh effects.”

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