

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2022

HOUSE RESOLUTION

HONORING AND CELEBRATING THE HEROIC ACTIONS OF THE 1ST RHODE ISLAND REGIMENT, BETTER KNOWN AS THE "BLACK REGIMENT", DURING THE AMERICAN REVOLUTIONARY WAR

Introduced By: Representatives McGaw, Shekarchi, Blazejewski, Filippi, Cortvriend, Williams, Abney, Carson, Kennedy, and Solomon

Date Introduced: February 15, 2022

Referred To: House read and passed

1 WHEREAS, The 1st Rhode Island Regiment was the first Black battalion in United  
2 States history and was one of the few units in the Continental Army to serve throughout the entire  
3 war; and

4 WHEREAS, General George Washington faced severe shortages of troops early in the  
5 war and as a result, the Continental Congress adopted a draft with a mandate that each state fill  
6 certain militia quotas based on population. Rhode Island had the smallest population when the  
7 revolution began, and when it couldn't attain enough soldiers from the white population, it  
8 appealed to General Washington to allow free and enslaved black men to enlist; and

9 WHEREAS, The Slave Enlistment Act was passed in February of 1778, and allowed any  
10 enslaved person who joined the 1st Rhode Island Regiment to be "immediately discharged from  
11 the service of his master or mistress, and be absolutely free, as though he had never been  
12 encumbered without any kind of servitude or slavery." More than 130 enslaved men from all  
13 corners of Rhode Island joined the Black Regiment in the first few months after the law took  
14 effect; and

15 WHEREAS, The 1st Regiment, also known as the "Black Regiment", soon had an  
16 important impact on the Revolutionary War when they repeatedly repelled the British forces and  
17 their Hessian allies during the Battle of Rhode Island that took place in 1788 in Portsmouth.  
18 Despite numerous attacks from the enemy forces, including three assaults by the Hessian Army,  
19 the 1st Regiment held the line and prevented the Hessians and British from capturing all of

1 Aquidneck Island; and

2 WHEREAS, The 1st Regiment then proceeded to valiantly serve our nation in critical  
3 battles and actions at Fort Oswego and Saratoga, New York, in Red Bank, New Jersey, and at the  
4 crucial battle of Yorktown; and

5 WHEREAS, When the 1st Regiment disbanded after the Revolutionary War, they  
6 received precious little recognition or financial compensation. Their legacy might have been lost  
7 to history, but thankfully since 1967, their heroic actions in defense of freedom and liberty have  
8 been recognized and memorialized by the Newport County Branch of the NAACP which has  
9 been conducting Black Regiment Commemoration Ceremonies at Patriots Park in Portsmouth.  
10 Thanks to the tireless efforts of many Branch members, a beautiful monument honoring the 1st  
11 Regiment was established at the original location of the Battle of Rhode Island; now, therefore be  
12 it

13 RESOLVED, That this House of Representatives of the State of Rhode Island hereby  
14 honors and celebrates the heroic actions of the 1st Rhode Island Regiment, better known as the  
15 "Black Regiment", during the American Revolutionary War; and be it further

16 RESOLVED, That the Secretary of State be and hereby is authorized and directed to  
17 transmit a duly certified copy of this resolution to Jimmy Winters, President, Newport County  
18 Branch NAACP.

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