

RESOLUTION NO. _____

A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF OLYMPIA, WASHINGTON REQUESTING THE WASHINGTON STATE GOVERNMENT AND THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT TO CREATE A COMMISSION TO STUDY REPARATIONS FOR THE DESCENDANTS OF ENSLAVED AFRICAN PEOPLE AND IMPLEMENT COMMISSION RECOMMENDATIONS

WHEREAS, reparations are a process of repairing, healing and restoring people injured because of their group identity and in violation of their fundamental human rights by governments, corporations, institutions, and families; and

WHEREAS, those groups that have been injured have the right to obtain from the government, corporation, institution or family responsible for the injuries which they suffered and need to repair and to heal themselves. Such reparations include but are not limited to direct cash payments, land, housing, college education, and healthcare; and

WHEREAS, during the Middle Passage approximately 12.5 million Africans were forced onto ships crossing the Atlantic Ocean between 1517 and 1867 bound for enslavement in America; and

WHEREAS, between 1619 and 1865, an estimated 4,000,000 people were unjustly enslaved in the British colonies, and subsequently after the American Revolution, in the United States of America; and

WHEREAS, traces of this history can be found here in Olympia, with the arrival of an enslaved 13-year-old boy by the name of Charles Mitchell who escaped to freedom in Victoria, British Columbia, Canada via the Puget Sound; and

WHEREAS, slavery represented an irreconcilable contradiction in our nation's founding: a young democracy committed to the ideals of liberty and justice and yet actively perpetuating the degradation of Black people. This contradiction, what some have called our nation's original sin, has yet to be fully addressed and systemic racism continues to this day; and

WHEREAS, the early American economy was built with the labor of enslaved people who were denied the ability to generate wealth from their labor and who were instead subjected to brutal and inhumane abuses including violence, the forced separation of families, being denied access to education and voting, and death; and

WHEREAS, during the American Civil War enslaved communities were promised forty acres and a mule under Special Field Orders N.015 by Union General William Tecumseh Sherman on January 16, 1865. A promise that was never kept by the United States Government, which resulted in the inability for Black Americans to collectively produce intergenerational wealth for their descendants; and

WHEREAS, even after slavery was abolished by the 13th Amendment with the exception under imprisonment, Black Americans in the South continued to be persecuted under Jim Crow laws and segregation and economic discrimination in northern cities; and

WHEREAS, many Black Americans could not effectively exercise the right to vote in the United States until the passage of the Voting Rights Act in 1965 due to racist state and local voter suppression laws; and

WHEREAS, even after the era of legal segregation ended, Black Americans continue to experience the harms of institutional and systemic racism embedded into deep systems from housing redlining, white flight from inner cities, denial of ownership of goods and services, denial to participate in the whole economy, the denied right to equitable loans, and uneven labor rights. Systems that today communities of color have not recovered from; and

WHEREAS, despite decades of policy-level efforts and community and faith-based efforts to create racial justice, deep disparities persist for Black people in Olympia and Thurston County, including but not limited to the areas of infant mortality, home ownership, ownership of businesses, earnings, health, education, justice system involvement, incarceration, and life expectancy; and

WHEREAS, Black People historically and presently receive inadequate, if not detrimental, health care as exemplified by disproportionate morbidities and mortality rates that result from the generational trauma of systemic racism, discriminatory treatment by medical professionals, and discriminatory medical practices such as involuntary sterilizations, denial of adequate testing, denial of preventative and curative procedures; and

WHEREAS, Black People have been unjustly targeted by law enforcement and the criminal justice system, incarcerated at disproportionate rates and subsequently excluded from full participation in the benefits of citizenship that include voting, employment, housing and health care; and

WHEREAS, Black People have disproportionately been forced to reside in, adjacent to, or near Brown Zones and other toxic sites that negatively impact their health and property and have disproportionately been limited to the confined routes of travel provided by public transportation; and

WHEREAS, Black People have disproportionately suffered from the isolation of food deserts and childcare deserts; and

WHEREAS, Black people comprise approximately 3% of the population of Olympia, and in Thurston County BIPOC households are more likely to be renters with approximately 42% of BIPOC households renting compared to 31% of white households; and

WHEREAS, in 2023, Governor Jay Inslee signed 2SHB 1474 which created a downpayment assistance program for people affected by racist covenants, which were often used to ban property from being sold or rented to non-whites. Descendants of those discriminated against also qualify under the law; and

WHEREAS, the Racial Restrictive Covenants Project involves research teams at the University of Washington and Eastern Washington University, that have identified about 50,000 properties in Washington state with legal clauses that excluded people who were not white; and

WHEREAS, local, state, and federal government have a leadership role in supporting economic development, public education and health care in our community and must assure this vital work is carried out, so all people have an equal opportunity to thrive and that no part of our community is left behind; and

WHEREAS, the U.S. Congress passed resolutions via House Bill 194 in 2008 and Senate Concurrent Resolution 26 in 2009, apologizing for slavery and Jim Crow laws, however our country has not yet made reparations for these harms, which have now passed through generations of Black Americans. It is an undeniable truth that the longer the delay, the longer the harm; and

WHEREAS, this is a national debt that is owed and the United States has made reparations to other communities who have experienced human rights violations and systemic racism, including Japanese Americans who were interned during World War II and their descendants; Pueblo Native Americans in 1924; Navajo-Hopi Native Americans in 1950; Alaskan Native Americans in 1971; Seminole and Chippewa Native Americans in 1985; and Ottawa Native Americans all via acts of Congress supported by presidents Coolidge, Truman, Nixon, and Reagan, respectively; and

WHEREAS, systemic racism was created over centuries and will take time to dismantle; and

WHEREAS, state and federal governments have a responsibility to adopt programs, policies, and funding to address reparations.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF OLYMPIA, WASHINGTON as follows:

1. That the Washington State Legislature, Washington State Office of the Governor, United States Congress, and the Office of the President of the United States work towards forming a commission to study reparations for the descendants of enslaved peoples to initiate the process of rectifying centuries of systemic oppression and intergenerational trauma, which has led to disparities in nearly all areas of life for Black Americans over generations.
2. Supports the Washington State Commission on African American Affairs' unanimous decision to advise the Governor to create the Charles Mitchell Commission to Study Reparations for the descendants of enslaved African Americans.
3. A copy of this resolution be sent to the Washington State Legislature, including the Legislative Black Caucus, Washington State Office of the Governor, Offices of Congresswoman Marilyn Strickland and U.S. Senators Patty Murray and Maria Cantwell and urge Congress to pass HR 40 - Commission to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans Act.
4. Encourage other Washington cities and counties to pass a similar resolution and join the City of Olympia in calling for the study of reparations for the descendants of enslaved people.
5. Direct City of Olympia staff to research possible city-scale actions and continue to explore ways the city government can support efforts to petition our state and federal governments to study this issue and implement findings. Meanwhile, connecting our own Olympia Strong initiatives, Comprehensive Plan, Fair Housing Assessment, Capital Facilities, and non-government and governmental partnerships to our city's plans, and research cities that have taken similar actions.

6. The City of Olympia should establish a goal to go beyond minimal federal requirements when it comes to hiring equity practices. Our partnerships with the Olympia School District and within our capital contracting, are but a few examples.
7. Encourages Thurston County to partner with The Black Homeownership Initiative in King-Pierce County to address racial inequities as a regional effort within our collective housing ecosystem along with other relevant organizations and institutions. It is recommended that Thurston County and the City of Olympia establish clear goals for Black and African American homeownership.
8. The City of Olympia will continue efforts in reparative justice to increase Black homeownership with particular focus as part of the City's housing strategy following the City's Affordable Homeownership Research Study.

PASSED BY THE OLYMPIA CITY COUNCIL this _____ day of _____ 2024.

MAYOR

ATTEST:

CITY CLERK

APPROVED AS TO FORM:

Mark Barber
CITY ATTORNEY