

Township of Lawrence  
County of Mercer

**Resolution 265-22**

**A RESOLUTION ENDORSING THE ENACTMENT OF BILLS A938/S386  
THE "NEW JERSEY REPARATIONS TASK FORCE ACT"**

**WHEREAS, the "New Jersey Reparations Task Force Act" will authorize research and development of reparatory proposals and recommendations to address the generational harms caused by New Jersey's role in America's institution of slavery and its legacy of systemic racial discrimination; and**

**WHEREAS, Lawrence Township is a multicultural and diverse city which is home to 3,897 Black people according to the 2020 census, who make up more than 11.78% of the town's population; and**

**WHEREAS, from 1619 to 1865, approximately 4,000,000 Africans and their descendants, under a practice that was constitutionally and statutorily sanctioned, were enslaved in the United States and the colonies that became the United States; and**

**WHEREAS, the system of slavery that flourished in the United States constituted an immoral, shameful, and inhumane deprivation of the life, liberty, humanity, citizenship, and cultural heritage of Africans and denied them also, among other things, the fruits of their own labor upon which this country, and its economy, was built; and**

**WHEREAS, slavery took root very deeply in New Jersey, as with its southern neighbors, slavery played a key role in New Jersey's economic development. New Jersey was known as "the slave state of the North." In the early 17th Century, the first enslaved African people arrived in New Netherland, a Dutch settlement established in the Mid-Atlantic, which included portions of present-day New Jersey. When New Jersey was settled as a colony, white settlers received 150 acres of land and were eligible to receive an additional 150 acres for every enslaved person they brought with them. As the demand for labor increased, the number of enslaved African people imported to New Jersey increased. By 1790, there were 11,500 enslaved people in New Jersey, making it home to more enslaved people than all of New England. In 1704, the Province of New Jersey introduced the "Slave Code," which prohibited enslaved Africans and free Africans from owning property and made certain actions, like staying out past curfew, illegal for Black people. By 1830, over two-thirds of all enslaved people in the North were held in New Jersey. Although New Jersey outlawed the importation of enslaved Africans in 1786 and enacted the "Gradual Abolition Act of 1804" to abolish slavery gradually, New Jersey was the only Northern State to actively enforce the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, the State Legislature passed "Peace Resolutions" in 1863 denying President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation and later voted against the 13<sup>th</sup> amendment to the United States Constitution, only ratifying the amendment to abolish slavery after it had already become part of the United States Constitution, thereby making New Jersey the last Northern state to abolish slavery; and**



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**WHEREAS, records of slavery in Lawrence Township span from 1709 to the early 19th century, as government records indicate that prominent landowners such as Lewis W. R. Phillips, Waters Smith, Charles Reeder, Ralph Phillips, and Charles Green were enslavers. Census records chart a gradual transition from enslaved-status to free-status during the 1840s; but children born after the 1804 Gradual Abolition of Slavery act still had to serve a period of mandatory service to their enslavers until age 21, for females, or 25, for males. Twenty-two individual enslavers in what is now Lawrence Township had one or more children bound to serve them under this law. Phillips joined the antislavery movement, but only as a member of the NJ Colonization Society (a chapter of the American Colonization Society), which advocated for the relocation of freed slaves back to Africa—an option which many American-born Blacks chose not to embrace. Ongoing research continues to uncover more about Lawrenceville's connection to slavery as another area resident, Benjamin Van Cleve (1739-1817), was an enslaver operating a plantation on land that is now part of the campus of Rider University. The university's 2020 report showed that the Van Cleve House was in fact used as Rider's Office of Admission; and**

**WHEREAS, an overwhelming body of scholarship; historical, legal, political, economic, sociological, cultural and community evidentiary documentation, and the modern day lived experiences of the descendants of enslaved Africans form the basis for inquiry into the ongoing effects of the institution of slavery and its legacy of persistent systemic structures of discrimination on living Black people and communities in the United States; and**

**WHEREAS, the legacy of slavery has given rise to systematic and persistent racism which still pervades American society and has resulted in inequities in access to democracy, infrastructure, youth justice, housing, education, healthcare along with racial wealth gaps and segregation, the effects of which are still felt and endured by Black communities and residents of Lawrence, to this day; and**

**WHEREAS, to address these systemic challenges in New Jersey, the "New Jersey Reparations Task Force" will research, write, and publish a report that will examine the institution of slavery in New Jersey as well as the extent to which the State of New Jersey and the Federal government prevented, opposed or restricted efforts of Black people to thrive upon the ending of slavery and make recommendations for what remedies should be proposed in New Jersey and outline policy recommendations that seek to repair the harm that has resulted from America's original sin in the Garden State; and**

**WHEREAS, the Council requested that the Township Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Committee review and provide guidance on the resolution; and**

**WHEREAS, public comment to both Township Council and the DEI Committee highlighted not only the history of slavery within Lawrence but the need for a better understanding and awareness of such history; and**

**WHEREAS, during public comment many residents expressed a desire to assist the township in better addressing this history and in creating programming that sought to address the impacts of systemic racism within our own community.**



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**NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** by the Township Council of the Township of Lawrence, County of Mercer, State of New Jersey that:

1. The Township fully endorses the enactment of the “New Jersey Reparations Task Force” Act
2. The Township urges the Lawrence Township Board of Education to join Township Council in both support of the Task Force and in finding actions to enhance understanding of the impact of slavery within Lawrence and to address the impact of systemic racism within our own community.
3. The Township asks Mercer County Executive Brian M. Hughes to identify ways to enhance Mercer County programs to further education on the impact of slavery in Mercer County and to identify ways to address systemic racism with the county community.
4. Township Council asks the DEI committee to continue its work to identify actions and programs. within our local community to enhance understanding of the impact of slavery within our community and to reduce the impact of systemic racism on our residents.
5. The Municipal Clerk is hereby directed to forward a certified copy of this resolution to the New Jersey Assembly and the New Jersey Senate (including Lawrence’s local representatives of those bodies) as well as the Lawrence Township Board of Education and the Mercer County Executive.

Adopted: July 19, 2022

I, Tonya D. Carter, the Municipal Clerk of the Township of Lawrence hereby certify that at a meeting of the Governing Body held on Tuesday, July 19, 2022 the above resolution was duly adopted.

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Tonya D. Carter, Municipal Clerk

RECORD OF VOTE

COUNCIL	AYE	NAY	PRESENT	ABSENT	ABSTAIN	MOVE	SECOND
Mr. Bobbitt							
Mr. Kownacki							
Ms. Lewis							
Mr. Powers							
Mayor Ryan							