

# SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION

No. 64

## STATE OF NEW JERSEY

221st LEGISLATURE

PRE-FILED FOR INTRODUCTION IN THE 2024 SESSION

**Sponsored by:**

**Senator PARKER SPACE**

**District 24 (Morris, Sussex and Warren)**

**SYNOPSIS**

Designates July 18 of each year “Sergeant William Harvey Carney Day” in New Jersey.

**CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT**

Introduced Pending Technical Review by Legislative Counsel.



**SJR64 SPACE**

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- 1 **A JOINT RESOLUTION** designating July 18 of each year as  
2 “Sergeant William Harvey Carney Day” in New Jersey.  
3
- 4 **WHEREAS**, William Harvey Carney was born into slavery on February  
5 29, 1840 in Virginia, but was granted freedom after his father, who  
6 had escaped through the Underground Railroad, was able to buy his  
7 family’s freedom and move them to Massachusetts; and
- 8 **WHEREAS**, Wishing to fight in the American Civil War, Mr. Carney  
9 joined the 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry in 1863; and
- 10 **WHEREAS**, The 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry was one of the  
11 first African-American regiments in the United States Army during  
12 the Civil War and was the first official unit made up of black  
13 enlisted men to fight for the Union; and
- 14 **WHEREAS**, Though initially promised the same rate of pay as their  
15 white counterparts in other regiments, the soldiers of the 54th  
16 Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry were paid markedly less and this  
17 injustice was only corrected when Congress passed a bill to  
18 equalize pay for black Union soldiers on June 15, 1864; and
- 19 **WHEREAS**, During the July 18, 1863 attack on Fort Wagner in South  
20 Carolina, with the 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry leading  
21 the attack in their first major combat mission, Mr. Carney witnessed  
22 his unit’s color guard shot and killed; and
- 23 **WHEREAS**, Upon seeing the color guard fall, Mr. Carney grasped the  
24 flag, led the way to the parapet, and planted the colors until the 54th  
25 Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry was forced to fall back, but even  
26 then he continued to carry the flag leading him to become severely  
27 wounded; and
- 28 **WHEREAS**, Despite his severe wounds, Mr. Carney guarded the  
29 symbol of America with his life and kept it flying high throughout  
30 the battle, refusing to relinquish it to anyone other than a fellow  
31 54th soldier upon return to the Union barracks; and
- 32 **WHEREAS**, Despite their contributions to the Union war efforts, with  
33 the bravery and valor of the 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry  
34 noted to have convinced many politicians and Army officers of the  
35 value of black soldiers and prompting the further enlistment of  
36 black soldiers, the regiment faced discrimination from their  
37 inception; and
- 38 **WHEREAS**, In recognition of his bravery, Mr. Carney was promoted to  
39 the rank of sergeant and was awarded a Congressional Medal of  
40 Honor in 1900; and
- 41 **WHEREAS**, Mr. Carney was not only one of the few recipients to earn  
42 a Congressional Medal of Honor while fighting on American soil,  
43 but was also the first African-American to be awarded this honor;  
44 and
- 45 **WHEREAS**, The bravery of the 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry,  
46 along with its individual soldiers like Mr. Carney, have been  
47 immortalized in various mediums, including the song “Boys the  
48 Old Flag Never Touched the Ground” and the 1989 film *Glory*; and

1 **WHEREAS**, The bravery of the 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry  
2 and William Harvey Carney should be memorialized by a day that  
3 recognizes their triumphs not only on the battlefield, but also over  
4 racial discrimination and biases; now, therefore,

5

6 **BE IT RESOLVED** *by the Senate and General Assembly of the*  
7 *State of New Jersey:*

8

9 1. July 18 of each year shall be designated as “Sergeant  
10 William Harvey Carney Day” in New Jersey to recognize and  
11 commemorate the heroic actions of William Harvey Carney, the  
12 first black soldier to earn the Medal of Honor.

13

14 2. The Governor is respectfully requested to issue a  
15 proclamation calling upon public officials and the citizens of this  
16 State to observe “Sergeant William Harvey Carney Day” with  
17 appropriate activities and programs each year.

18

19 3. This joint resolution shall take effect immediately.

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22 STATEMENT

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24 This resolution designates July 18 of each year as “Sergeant  
25 William Harvey Carney Day” in New Jersey.

26 William Harvey Carney was born into slavery on February 29,  
27 1840 in Virginia, but was granted freedom after his father, who had  
28 escaped through the Underground Railroad, was able to buy his  
29 family’s freedom and move them to Massachusetts. Wishing to  
30 fight in the American Civil War, Mr. Carney joined the 54th  
31 Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry in 1863, which was one of the  
32 first African-American regiments in the United States organized  
33 during the Civil War and the first official black unit recruited to  
34 fight for the Union.

35 During the July 18, 1863 attack on Fort Wagner in South  
36 Carolina, with the 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry leading  
37 the attack in their first major combat mission, Mr. Carney witnessed  
38 his unit’s color guard shot and killed. Upon seeing this, Mr. Carney  
39 grasped the flag, led the way to the parapet, and planted the colors  
40 until the 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry was forced to fall  
41 back, but even then he continued to carry the flag leading him to  
42 become severely wounded. Despite his severe wounds, Mr. Carney  
43 guarded the symbol of a united America with his life and kept it  
44 flying high throughout the battle, refusing to relinquish it to anyone  
45 other than a fellow 54th soldier upon return to the Union barracks.

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7 American soil, but also the first African-American to be awarded  
8 this honor.

9 The bravery of the 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, along  
10 with its individual soldiers like Mr. Carney, have been immortalized  
11 in various mediums, including the song “Boys the Old Flag Never  
12 Touched the Ground” and the 1989 film *Glory*. The bravery of the  
13 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry and Mr. Carney should be  
14 memorialized by a day that recognizes their triumphs not only on  
15 the battlefield, but also over racial discrimination and biases.