

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

As reported by the Senate Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee with technical review.



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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

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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:*

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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.

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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.