

Proclamation

Board of Commissioners for Washington County

A PROCLAMATION IN HONOR OF BLACK HISTORY MONTH 2025

WHEREAS, the Washington County Board of Commissioners takes pride in recognizing February 2025 as Black History Month, honoring the many notable contributions that people of African descent have made to our country; and

WHEREAS, we celebrate the diversity of Black people in Washington County, the State of Oregon, our nation and the Black diaspora, whether they self-identify as African, African American, Afro-Latino, Afro-Caribbean, or Black; with this year's Black History Month theme of "**African Americans and Labor**" which focuses on the various and profound ways that work and working of all kinds – free and unfree, skilled, and unskilled, vocational and voluntary – intersect with the collective experiences of Black people and has helped to shape our county, state, and region; and

WHEREAS, the theme, "African Americans and Labor," intends to encourage broad reflections on intersections between Black people's work and their workplaces in all their iterations and key moments, themes, and events in Black history and culture across time and space and throughout the U.S., Africa, and the Diaspora; and

WHEREAS, Africans were brought to the Americas to be enslaved for their knowledge and serve as a workforce, which was superexploited by several European countries and then by the United States government. During enslavement, Black people labored for others, although some Black people were quasi-free and labored for themselves, but operated within a county that did not value Black life; and

WHEREAS, after fighting for their freedom in the Civil War and in the country's transition from an agriculturally based economy to an industrial one, African Americans became sharecroppers, farm laborers, landowners, and then wage earners. Additionally, African Americans' contributions to the built landscape can be found in every part of the nation as they constructed and designed some of the most iconic examples of architectural heritage in the country; and

WHEREAS, Black workers participated in labor actions even before the Civil War, with documented strikes like the 1835 Washington Navy Yard caulkers strike by Black ship-caulkers. The "Colored Caulkers Trade Union Society" founded by Isaac Myers was one of the first Black trade unions, fighting discrimination in the ship caulking industry; and

WHEREAS, the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, led by A. Philip Randolph, became the first predominately Black labor union to be recognized by the American Federation of Labor, representing mostly Black railway workers; and

WHEREAS, a story of African Americans and labor is not complete without the story of the now legendary Mary McLeod Bethune, who was elected as the first female president of the National Association of Teachers in Colored Schools which would eventually merge with the National Education Association (NEA) to become the union we know today; and

WHEREAS, following World War II, Black labor activism became increasingly intertwined with the Civil Rights movement, with leaders like Martin Luther King Jr., Bayard Rustin, Hattie Canty, and more recently in 2021 Chris Smalls who led the charge for Amazon workers in Staten Island, New York to establish the Amazon Labor Union. All of these individuals advocating for better working conditions for Black workers throughout centuries; and

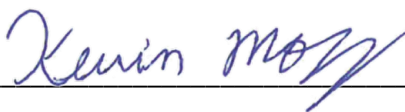
WHEREAS, despite these accomplishments, systemic racism persists in the United States, generating continued calls for lasting institutional and societal change so desperately needed in our country; and

WHEREAS, today and every day, we celebrate African Americans and Labor, and encourage all people to recognize and confront systemic racism in our neighborhoods and the wider community by standing in the gap at every opportunity, bridging barriers with fearlessness and determination to fight against racism and bigotry and improve representation of Black people, not only in the world of labor but all facets of our society.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Washington County Board of Commissioners do hereby proclaim February 1st – February 28th, 2025, as Black History Month and calls upon the people of Washington County to observe this month with appropriate programs, activities and reflections and to continue our efforts to create a world that is more just, equitable and prosperous for all.



Kathryn Harrington, Washington County Board Chair



Recording Secretary



25-20