

DURHAM BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Resolution

OBSERVING JANUARY 1, 2025 AS EMANCIPATION DAY

- WHEREAS,** on January 1, 1863, President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, a landmark executive order that declared freedom for enslaved American Negroes in Confederate states, symbolizing a profound commitment to the values of liberty and justice for all; and
- WHEREAS,** Emancipation Day was first celebrated in North Carolina on January 1, 1865, in Union-occupied New Bern, with a procession through the city, a public reading of the Emancipation Proclamation, and speeches by Freedmen leaders, marking the start of an enduring tradition of commemoration and celebration; and
- WHEREAS,** early Emancipation Day celebrations, while initially coordinated by Union forces, quickly became vital expressions of autonomy and community empowerment led by these new, Freedmen Americans, who emphasized prosperity through frugality, temperance, industry, and education as guiding principles for their future; and
- WHEREAS,** by the late 19th century, Emancipation Day observances had gained widespread respect and participation across racial and political lines in North Carolina, serving as a powerful platform for civic engagement and reflection, and drawing notable speakers, including state officials and prominent figures such as former Congressman H.P. Cheatham; and
- WHEREAS,** the recognition of Emancipation Day in Durham County honors the legacy of resilience and resistance exemplified by Black Americans throughout our history, especially in the face of systemic injustice, and acknowledges the county’s role in fostering a vibrant Freedmen community and economy, including the historic contributions of Black Wall Street; and
- WHEREAS,** it is crucial that we never forget the profound impact of slavery and its lasting legacy on our society, and that we continue to educate future generations about this history and the ongoing struggle for racial equity, justice, and civil rights in our community and beyond; and
- WHEREAS,** the observance of Emancipation Day aligns with Durham County’s commitment to promoting equity, inclusivity, and community development, reflecting our values of honoring the past to build a more just and equitable future for Black American families descended from those formerly enslaved in North Carolina.

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED,** that we, the members of the Durham County Board of Commissioners, do hereby resolve to designate January 1, 2025 as Emancipation Day in Durham County, and encourage all residents, businesses, community organizations, and educational institutions to join in recognizing this important day through acts of reflection, public celebrations, educational activities, and community service; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED,** that this observance serves as a reaffirmation of Durham County’s dedication to advancing racial justice and economic equity, and as a reminder of the enduring importance of emancipation as a cornerstone of American democracy and freedom.

This the 9<sup>th</sup> day of December 2024.

Nida Allam, Chair

Dr. Mike Lee, Vice Chair

Michelle Burton, Commissioner

Wendy Jacobs, Commissioner

Stephen Valentine, Commissioner

