



## Legislation Text

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**File #:** 59338, **Version:** 1

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### **Fiscal Note**

No appropriation required.

### **Title**

Recognizing February 2020 as Black History Month in the City of Madison.

### **Body**

WHEREAS, the theme of Black History Month for 2020 is "African Americans and the Vote"; and,

WHEREAS, the year 2020 marks the sesquicentennial of the Fifteenth Amendment (1870) and the right of black men to the ballot after the Civil War; and,

WHEREAS, this year's theme speaks to the ongoing struggle on the part of both black men and black women for the right to vote which began at the turn of the nineteenth century with the states' passage of laws that democratized the vote for white men while disenfranchising free black men; and,

WHEREAS, even before the Civil War, black men petitioned their legislatures and the US Congress, seeking to be recognized as voters and while tensions between abolitionists and women's suffragists first surfaced in the aftermath of the Civil War, black disfranchisement laws in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries undermined the guarantees in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments for the great majority of southern blacks until the Voting Rights Act of 1965; and,

WHEREAS, the important contribution of black suffragists occurred not only within the larger women's movement, but within the larger black voting rights movement. Through voting-rights campaigns and legal suits from the turn of the twentieth century to the mid-1960s, African Americans made their voices heard as to the importance of the vote and continues even today in our courts; and,

WHEREAS, when Wisconsin was preparing to become a state in 1846, leaders in the state drafted a constitution that put the voting rights of African Americans up to a popular vote, which was rejected in 1847; and,

WHEREAS, a second referendum allowing African-American men to vote was approved in 1849 but the result of this vote was misconstrued by local election officials until 1866; and

WHEREAS, Ezekiel Gillespie, a leader in Milwaukee's black community, sued for the right to vote and carried his case to the Wisconsin Supreme Court; and,

WHEREAS, the Court found that African-American men had actually been able to cast ballots in the Badger State since the 1849 referendum; and,

WHEREAS, in 1882 the word "white" was removed from the text of the state constitution's article on suffrage; and,

WHEREAS the theme of the vote also includes the rise of black elected and appointed officials at the local and national levels, campaigns for equal rights legislation, as well as the role of blacks in traditional and alternative political parties; and,

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Mayor and Madison Common Council recognizes February 2020 as Black History Month in the City of Madison and around the United States; and,

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the city encourages the celebration of this month by inviting all residents in the city to learn more about African American history to better understand the experiences of African Americans and how they have shaped our nation.

*(Source: Association for the Study of African American Live and History: <https://asalh.org/black-history-themes/> and Wisconsin State Historical Society: <https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Article/CS502>)*