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City of Detroit
City Council
REPARATIONS TASK FORCE

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District 7
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At-Large
VACANT
At-Large

To: City Council President Mary Sheffield
CC: Paris Blessman, Legislative Director, Office of City Council President
From: Emberly Vick, Project Manager, Detroit Reparations Task Force
Date: 20 February 2024

Subject: Request for the Drafting of a Resolution in Support of House Bill H.R. 40 from Detroit Reparations Task Force

Dear City Council President Sheffield,

I am writing on behalf of the Detroit Reparations Task Force to formally request that you ask the Legislative Policy Division to draft a resolution in support of House Bill H.R. 40.

As you are aware, House Bill H.R. 40, titled the Commission to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans Act, seeks to establish a commission to study and develop reparation proposals for the institution of constitutionally and statutorily sanctioned slavery. The Detroit Reparations Task Force believes that supporting this bill is a crucial step towards addressing historical injustices, as well as the lasting legacy of the racism and brutality that is inextricably linked to the Trans-Atlantic and domestic slave trade.

Furthermore, the Task Force would like the resolution to explicitly specify an investigation into monetary compensation as a form of reparations. Monetary compensation is essential to providing direct redress to individuals and families who have suffered from persistent and systemic racism and inequality throughout generations.

We believe that endorsing House Bill H.R. 40 and advocating for monetary compensation within the resolution aligns with the principles of justice and equity that the City Council stands for. It is imperative that our city takes a proactive stance in supporting initiatives that aim to rectify past and present wrongs against our predominantly African American community.

We kindly request that the Legislative Policy Division promptly drafts this resolution as the first recommendation from the Detroit Reparations Task Force. Your support and leadership on this matter are greatly appreciated.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue. Please do not hesitate to reach out if you require any further information.

Sincerely,

Emberly Vick
Project Manager
Detroit Reparations Task Force

**A RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL H.R. 40,
THE COMMISSION TO STUDY AND DEVELOP REPARATION PROPOSALS
FOR AFRICAN AMERICANS ACT**

BY COUNCIL PRESIDENT MARY SHEFFIELD

Whereas, over the course of nearly 300 years, at least 12,500,000 Africans were kidnapped from their homelands and forcibly brought across the Atlantic Ocean in one of the largest displacements in human history, and at least 2,000,000 did not survive the horrifying and brutal journey across the Atlantic, also known as the Middle Passage, and

Whereas, forcibly separating Black families was a murderous and tortuous reality for millions of enslaved Africans leaving them to endure the loss of loved ones and the perpetual psychological and emotional trauma, of losing all sense of identity, and

Whereas, the dehumanization, deculturalization and atrocities of slavery in the United States were codified, mandated, and protected by the United States constitution and other state and federal laws, and

Whereas, the 2001 United Nations World Conference Against Racism held in Durban South Africa acknowledged that the Trans-Atlantic slave trade and slavery were crimes against humanity, yet the United States has never acknowledged, apologized, or given reparations for the generations of expropriated labor, deprivation of freedom and rights, and terrorism against people of African descent resulting in widespread injury and death, and

Whereas, reparations are defined as a victim centered process by which survivors of atrocities and serious human rights violations, and their descendants, have the right to seek restitution, compensation, rehabilitation, satisfaction, and guarantees of non-repetition for past and ongoing harms, and

Whereas, to meet the international legal obligation of reparations, the Federal Government must compensate descendants of enslaved Black people and people of African descent in the United States to account for the harms of chattel slavery, the cumulative damages of enslavement, and the periods of legal and *de facto* segregation, and

Whereas, the institution of chattel slavery was responsible for the wholesale theft of wealth that fueled the commercial and industrial revolutions in the country, wealth extracted from the blood, sweat and tears of kidnapped and enslaved African people, and

Whereas, the systematic oppression and atrocities did not end with the legal abolition of chattel slavery. Black people were denied the “40 Acres and a Mule” as directed by General Sherman and embraced by President Lincoln, instead the formerly enslaved and their ancestors were subjected to “slavery by another name” in the form of the Convict Lease System, share cropping, tenant farming and agricultural labor under a brutal system of “Jim Crow” racial injustice in the South, and

Whereas, Jim Crow laws, discrimination in mortgage lending and a race-based system of mass incarceration created uncompensated wealth for individuals and white society as a whole, and

Whereas, the late, great Honorable Congressman John Conyers, Jr., the architect of the Martin Luther King Holiday bill, first introduced H.R.40 in 1989 to create a commission to study reparations, and faithfully re-introduced H.R.40, which has never been passed, every year until he left office in 2017, and

Whereas, In January 2023, House Bill H.R.40 was introduced in the 118th Congress, sponsored by Texas Representative Shelia Jackson Lee, and

Whereas, the purpose of “the Commission to Study and Develop Reparations Proposals for African Americans Act” is to address the fundamental injustice, cruelty, brutality and inhumanity of slavery in the United States and the 13 American colonies between 1619 and 1865 and to establish a commission to study and consider a national apology and proposal for reparations for the institution of slavery, its subsequent de jure and de facto racial and economic discrimination against African Americans, and the impact of these forces on living African Americans, to make recommendation to the Congress on appropriate remedies, and for other purposes, and

Whereas, reparations must be administered by the Federal Government to descendants of enslaved Black people and persons of African descent for sanctioning the kidnapping and trafficking of human beings, creating, and maintaining a violent racial hierarchy, embedding slavery and other methods of economic exploitation into the fabric of society, and emboldening white supremacy in legal, social, and economic tools of control, and

Whereas, it is estimated that the United States alone benefited from a total of 222,505,049 hours of forced labor between 1619 and the abolition of slavery in 1865. Valued at the U.S. minimum wage, with a modest rate of interest of 3%, is worth \$97 trillion (in 2018 dollars), and

Whereas, in 2022 the United Nations Committee on Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination recommended implementation of a federal reparations commission to develop proposals as a key strategy for achieving racial justice, and

Whereas, The Detroit City Council and Detroit Reparations Task Force recognize the responsibility of the Federal Government to provide reparations, in all necessary forms, including but not limited to financial compensation, to rectify ongoing harms resulting from violation, by the Federal Government, of Black people’s human right to self-determination and freedom from discrimination, including with respect to housing, health, education, life, security of person, water and sanitation, and a healthy environment, **Now, Therefore be it,**

Resolved, the Detroit City Council encourages support, passage and implementation of House Bill H.R. 40, the Commission to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans Act