

Support for a National Family Roots Genealogy Program

WHEREAS, The U.S. has a social responsibility and duty towards African American descendants of enslaved individuals to provide the public service of assisting Black citizens in reconnecting with their ancestral history; the State of Illinois has an equal responsibility to Black Illinoisans; and

WHEREAS, Since the first direct-to-consumer genetic ancestry test was pioneered in 2000, technological capabilities have vastly improved, enabling refined genetic genealogy that can trace ancestral connections over the past 500 years; given this advancement in technology, the U.S., honoring its moral obligation to descendants of enslaved Africans, is now exceptionally positioned to facilitate this reconnection through a genealogy-based program; and

WHEREAS, In addition to restoring a sense of personal belonging and ethnic identity, both being critical for psychological well-being, genetic genealogical evidence provides descendants of enslaved African Americans with robust genetic evidentiary support of their African family origins; several African countries, including Ghana, Sierra Leone, Gabon, and Eritrea have begun offering citizenship to individuals who can trace their ancestry back to their respective country, including ancestry traced through genetic genealogy; improvements in genetic genealogical technology provide new found support for the desire expressed by president Abraham Lincoln in the Emancipation Proclamation to establish a voluntary repatriation program for African descendants to return to their African ancestral homelands; and

WHEREAS, Nearly all Black Americans can successfully trace their genetic ancestry to one or more African countries; today, there are currently 42 million African American descendants of those enslaved in the U.S.; the genetic analyses completed in the Genetic Consequences of the Transatlantic Slave Trade in the Americas study by Steven Micheletti and colleagues found that African Americans tend to have ancestry from four main regions in Atlantic Africa, including Nigeria, Senegambia (Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, and Senegal), Coastal West Africa (Sierra Leone, Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, and Liberia), and the Congo region, which includes Angola and the Democratic Republic of the Congo; approximately 71% of African American 23andMe research participants had detectable segments of DNA that are identical with current ethnolinguistic groups from all four Atlantic African regions stemming from a common ancestor; as documented by Jazlyn Mooney and her colleagues in their study On the Number of Genealogical Ancestors Tracing to the Source Groups of an Admixed Population, there is a high probability, over 97.5%, that an average African American can trace their ancestry back to at least one African ancestor from each of eight to 12 generations ago culminating in an approximate total of 269 African ancestors within this timeframe; and

WHEREAS, Approximately 15% of Black adults in the U.S. have taken consumer genetic genealogy tests; African Americans should not be economically burdened to obtain information regarding their ancestral history, which was forcibly taken from them through practices of slavery that economically benefited the growing United States; and

WHEREAS, Reparations have been granted towards other groups residing in the U.S., yet African Americans have never been compensated to redress the racial harms enacted upon their

person during times of slavery; while white slave owners were compensated for the emancipation of their slaves, enslaved individuals only had access to social support via the Freedmen's Bureau Act of 1865 and 1866, which provided basic needs including food, clothing, and shelter, due to the displacement of southerners after the Civil War; while the Evacuation Claims Act of 1948 and the Civil Liberties Act of 1988 paid reparations to Japanese Americans, up to \$20,000 per survivor, and the Indian Claims Commission allocates approximately \$1,000 per person, enslaved persons of African descent and their descendants have never received monetary compensation for the atrocities committed against them prior to the abolition of slavery; this is despite there having been over 10 million African Americans human trafficked from their families and homeland only to be forced to build the infrastructure of America and generate wealth for early white Americans; and

WHEREAS, It is technologically straightforward and a moral imperative to rectify the erasure of family histories resulting from slavery; it is now possible to establish a family roots genealogy program that can equip descendants of enslaved African Americans with robust genetic evidentiary support of their African family origins; and

THEREFORE let it be RESOLVED, that the National Organization of Black Elected Legislative (NOBEL) Women urge support for a national Family Roots Genealogy Program to provide African American descendants of enslaved individuals the opportunity to trace their roots back to their ancestral homelands, to reconnect with their ancestral heritage, and to promote their well-being.