

STATE OF MAINE

IN THE YEAR OF OUR LORD

TWO THOUSAND TWENTY-FOUR

**JOINT RESOLUTION RECOGNIZING JUNE 17, 2024 AS JAMES
WELDON JOHNSON DAY**

WHEREAS, James Weldon Johnson was a novelist and poet, songwriter, educator, attorney, journalist, diplomat and civil rights leader; and

WHEREAS, Johnson began his career as an educator in rural Georgia, where he taught the descendants of former slaves and eventually became principal of Stanton, a school for African American students, where he was paid half of what white colleagues were paid; and

WHEREAS, while working as a teacher, he studied law, becoming the first African American to be admitted to the Florida Bar since Reconstruction; and

WHEREAS, Johnson's gifts in poetry and music led him to join his younger brother's popular music trio in New York City in 1901, where he helped to write many of their songs; and

WHEREAS, Johnson entered the United States Consular Service in 1906 and served for 7 years as a diplomat, beginning in Puerto Cabello, Venezuela, and then in 1909 taking a post in Corinto, Nicaragua, where he successfully navigated an attempt to overthrow the Nicaraguan government through skilled negotiation; and

WHEREAS, Johnson became the first African American professor to be hired at New York University in 1934, and he later served as a professor of creative literature and writing at Fisk University, a historically Black university; and

WHEREAS, Johnson was involved with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, NAACP, from 1916 through the end of his life, serving as field secretary, executive secretary and as a vice president, helping to lead the fight against racial discrimination, segregation, violence and lynching; and

WHEREAS, Johnson became a key artistic figure in the Harlem Renaissance in the 1920s, continuing to publish notable collections of poems and spirituals, and is known in particular for writing the lyrics to "Lift Every Voice and Sing," which he wrote to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation and which became known as the Black National Anthem due to its enormous importance to African Americans; and

WHEREAS, in 1938, Johnson's life was cut short when he and his wife, Grace Nail Johnson, were returning from visiting a friend on Islesboro to their home in Florida and their car was struck by a train in Wiscasset, killing him and grievously injuring his wife; and

WHEREAS, following his death, his wife donated her husband's papers to the Yale University Library and helped to establish the James Weldon Johnson Memorial Collection of African American Arts and Letters in the Yale Collection of American Literature, which joins other national commemorative landmarks and institutes; and

WHEREAS, in the 130th Legislature, June 17th was designated as James Weldon Johnson Day, a result of a joint effort of those in his home state of Florida and the State of Maine; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED: That We, the Members of the One Hundred and Thirty-first Legislature now assembled in the Second Regular Session, on behalf of the people we represent, take this opportunity to recognize June 17, 2024 as James Weldon Johnson Day and to honor his remarkable achievements and his ongoing commitment to racial equity and progress.