

**STATE OF MAINE**

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**IN THE YEAR OF OUR LORD**

**TWO THOUSAND TWENTY-FIVE**

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**JOINT RESOLUTION CELEBRATING THE LIFE OF MARY  
MCLEOD BETHUNE**

**WHEREAS**, Mary McLeod Bethune, the daughter of formerly enslaved parents, was one of the most important Black educators, civil rights and women's rights leaders and government officials of the 20th century; and

**WHEREAS**, the college she founded set educational standards for today's Black colleges, and her role as an advisor to President Franklin Delano Roosevelt gave African Americans an advocate in government; and

**WHEREAS**, born on July 10, 1875 near Mayesville, South Carolina, she was one of the last of Samuel and Patsy McLeod's 17 children. After the Civil War, Mary's mother worked for her former owner until she could buy the land on which the family grew cotton. By age 9, Mary could pick 250 pounds of cotton per day; and

**WHEREAS**, she benefited from efforts to educate African Americans after the Civil War, graduating in 1894 from the Scotia Seminary, a boarding school in North Carolina. She next attended Dwight Moody's Institute for Home and Foreign Missions in Chicago, Illinois. But with no church willing to sponsor her as a missionary, she became an educator. While teaching in South Carolina, she married fellow teacher Albertus Bethune, with whom she had a son in 1899; and

**WHEREAS**, the Bethunes moved to Palatka, Florida, where Mary worked at the Presbyterian church and also sold insurance. In 1904, her marriage ended, and, determined to support her son, she opened a boarding school, the Daytona Literary and Industrial Training School for Negro Girls. Eventually, her school became a college, merging with the all-male Cookman Institute to form Bethune-Cookman College in 1929. It issued its first degrees in 1943; and

**WHEREAS**, a champion of racial and gender equality, Bethune founded many organizations and led voter registration drives after women gained the right to vote in 1920, risking racist attacks. In 1924, she was elected president of the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs and, in 1935, she became the founding president of the National Council of Negro Women. She also played a role in the transition of Black voters from the Republican Party, "the party of Lincoln," to the Democratic Party during the Great Depression. A friend of Eleanor Roosevelt, she became the highest-ranking African American woman in government when President Franklin Roosevelt named her director of Negro Affairs of the National Youth Administration in 1936. She remained there until 1944. She was also a leader of the president's unofficial "Black Cabinet"; and

**WHEREAS**, in 1937, Bethune organized the National Conference on the Problems of the Negro and Negro Youth and fought to end discrimination and lynching. In 1940, she became vice president of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored Persons, or NAACP, a position she held for the rest of her life. As a member of the advisory board that in

1942 created the Women's Army Corps, she ensured that the corps was racially integrated. Appointed by President Harry S. Truman, she was the only woman of color at the founding conference of the United Nations in 1945; and

**WHEREAS**, Bethune regularly wrote for leading African American newspapers the Pittsburgh Courier and the Chicago Defender and was a businesswoman who co-owned a Daytona, Florida resort and cofounded the Central Life Insurance Company of Tampa; and

**WHEREAS**, Bethune's life was celebrated with a memorial statue in Washington, D.C. in 1974 and a postage stamp in 1985, and her final residence is a National Historic Site. On July 13, 2022, she became the first African American to be represented with a state statue in the National Statuary Hall Collection at the United States Capitol; now, therefore, be it

**RESOLVED:** That We, the Members of the One Hundred and Thirty-second Legislature now assembled in the First Regular Session, take this occasion to honor the life and memory of Mary McLeod Bethune, a great American, for her efforts to educate African Americans, her political activism and advocacy in government and her championing of racial and gender equality.