

**STATE OF MAINE**

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**IN THE YEAR OF OUR LORD  
TWO THOUSAND TWENTY-FIVE**

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**JOINT RESOLUTION TO RECOGNIZE THE 125TH  
ANNIVERSARY OF THE POEM "LIFT EVERY VOICE AND  
SING" BY JAMES WELDON JOHNSON**

**WHEREAS**, James Weldon Johnson was a novelist, poet, songwriter, educator, attorney, journalist, diplomat and civil rights leader; 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 the trio's songs; 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 poem "Lift Every Voice and Sing," which he wrote in 1900 to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation; and

**WHEREAS**, the poem, written from the perspective of African Americans in the late 19th century, includes imagery that evokes the biblical Exodus from slavery to freedom and is an exhortation to all to become active participants in the struggle for freedom; and

**WHEREAS**, "Lift Every Voice and Sing" was converted into a song by James Weldon Johnson's brother John Rosamond Johnson and became known as the Black National Anthem due to its enormous importance to African Americans; and

**WHEREAS**, embedded within its lyrics are stories of triumph, struggle and freedom that resonate deeply for African Americans, especially during the reconstruction and civil rights eras, and the lyrics of "Lift Every Voice and Sing" serve as a reminder for Black Americans that each generation has had to lift their voices, along with those within their community, to demand and protect their human rights; and

**WHEREAS**, the song was performed for the first time on February 12, 1900 in Jacksonville, Florida by 500 school children in celebration of President Abraham Lincoln's birthday; and

**WHEREAS**, at the turn of the 20th century, Johnson's lyrics eloquently captured the solemn yet hopeful appeal for the liberty of Black Americans, and, set against the religious invocation of God and the promise of freedom, the song was later adopted by the NAACP and prominently used as a rallying cry during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s; and

**WHEREAS**, the song includes the lyrics "... Let our rejoicing rise / High as the list'ning skies / Let it resound loud as the rolling sea / Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us / Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us / Facing the rising sun of our new day begun / Let us march on 'til victory is won..."; and

**WHEREAS**, not only do the lyrics reflect how violence has been inflicted on the Black community, but it affirms and encourages the Black collective to remain faithful in its vision despite the struggles it has endured over the centuries; and

**WHEREAS**, the core message of the poem is that, through strong faith and solidarity, the Black community can move forward and reimagine a world where true liberty is achievable; 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 recognize the 125th anniversary of "Lift Every Voice and Sing."