Relating to: proclaiming February 2020 as Black History Month.

Whereas, Black History Month provides a deliberate opportunity to reflect on the common humanity underlying all people and to raise awareness and foster respect for the heritage and contributions of people of African descent; and

Whereas, African Americans have been living and working in Wisconsin since the 18th century, and records of their baptisms, marriages, and burials indicate that they were woven into the fabric of early life in the state; and

Whereas, Wisconsin history first references African descendants in a speech given in 1725 by a chief of the Illinois Indians, in which he said “a negro belonging to Monsieur de Boisbriant” at Green Bay; and

Whereas, the United States has recognized black history annually since February 12, 1926, first as “Negro History Week” and later as “Black History Month,” by noted Harvard scholar and historian Dr. Carter G. Woodson, celebrating the ethnic and racial diversity that enriches and strengthens our nation; and
Whereas, both enslaved and free people of African descent have participated in every aspect of America’s effort to secure, protect, and advance the cause of freedom and civil rights and have stories that are an inspiration to all citizens, that reflect the triumph of the human spirit and offer the hopes of everyday people to rise above both prejudice and circumstance and to build lives of dignity; and

Whereas, people of African descent or African Americans have made measurable differences in their respective industries, people such as:

- PFC Anna Mae Robertson—member of the 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion, the only Women’s Army Corps all-African American battalion that served overseas in World War II;
- Mabel Watson Raimey—Wisconsin’s first black female attorney and first African American female graduate of the University of Wisconsin-Madison;
- Susan Bazzelle Ellis and Millie White French—the first African American teachers hired by Milwaukee Public Schools;
- Jay Mayo “Ink” Williams—pioneering producer of recorded blues music. Williams was the most successful “race records” producer of his time, breaking all previous records for sales in the genre. His work was key to keeping the Paramount Records label of Grafton, Wisconsin afloat;
- Paul Jones—an enslaved leadworker in Sinsinawa, Grant County, Wisconsin, who sued his employer George W. Jones for $1,133 for trespassing on a promise to pay him wages. Paul Jones lost his case because enslaved people were not considered citizens, and therefore could not claim lost wages. Jones continued to work for George Jones until his emancipation in 1842, when he settled with other free blacks in the Pleasant Ridge community in Iowa County;
- Lillian Fishburne—the first African American female to be promoted to the rank of rear admiral in the U.S. Navy. Fishburne served as the chief of naval operations in Washington, DC;

- Richard Arrington, Jr.—the first black mayor of the city of Birmingham, Alabama, serving from 1979 to 1999. Arrington was the driving force behind the creation of the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, a museum dedicated to telling the story of Birmingham, an epicenter of the struggle for racial and civil rights;

- Kurtis Walker—known by his stage name “Kurtis Blow”, Walker is a songwriter, rapper, and record/film producer. He was one of the first commercially successful rappers and the first to sign with a major record label;

- Mildred Harpole—Milwaukee educator, civil rights activist, Marquette University graduate, and community leader who helped organize Freedom Schools to teach children about the effects of racism during the 1964 citywide school boycott to fight school segregation and went on to become a powerful advocate for fair housing working at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development;

- Dr. Rogers Onick—retired longtime Milwaukee Public Schools principal, president of Metropolitan Milwaukee Alliance of Black School Educators, and active community volunteer who generously supports students and teachers and shares his expertise with school leaders across Wisconsin;

- Dr. O.C. White—African American community leader and civil servant, affectionately known as Milwaukee’s black mayor, who created a job training program in the 1960s that helped numerous African American men and women find work in housing construction and, from the 1960s to the 1980s, served as a vital voice for the city DJing and storytelling on the old soul station WAWA;
• Kobe Bryant—the youngest starting all-star in NBA history, two-time Olympic gold medalist in basketball, and five-time NBA champion with the Los Angeles Lakers. Bryant was also an Academy Award-winning film producer and philanthropist;

• Gianna Bryant—award winning-basketball player with the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU). Bryant was a stellar student-athlete and youth ambassador for girls in sports; and

Whereas, while acknowledging the work of these leaders, it is equally critical to appreciate, both past and present, the long list of contributions of our fellow citizens. Black History Month gives Wisconsinites an occasion to recognize the significant influence people of African heritage have made, and continue to make, in the areas of medicine, art, politics, human rights, education, sports, and economic development; now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the assembly, the senate concurring, That the Wisconsin Legislature recognizes February 2020 as Black History Month and extends appreciation to the above-named persons for their contributions to the state of Wisconsin and the country and their fellow citizens.

(END)