

A RESOLUTION

Honoring the groundbreaking civil rights legacy of the Japanese American Citizens League on the occasion of its national convention in Philadelphia, and recognizing the 30th anniversary of the organization's successful redress campaign that led to the passage of the Civil Liberties Act of 1988, providing a national apology and financial reparations for Japanese Americans interned during World War II.

WHEREAS, The Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) was founded in 1929 as the first Asian American civil rights organization in the United States, with the goal of expanding citizenship rights for all Asian Americans; and

WHEREAS, The JACL was formed as a consortium of California and Washington-based organizations led by *Nisei*, Japanese immigrants' children who were born with American citizenship, who wished to build power to advocate for their community's civil rights and civil liberties; and

WHEREAS, The JACL's first campaigns included successful pushes both to amend the Cable Act of 1922, which initially revoked women's citizenship if they married men ineligible for citizenship, and to pass the Nye-Lea Act, which made veterans of World War I eligible for naturalization regardless of race; and

WHEREAS, During World War II, the JACL transformed a modest newsletter into a widely-circulated newspaper, the *Pacific Citizen*, which shared stories of Japanese American resistance, promoted Japanese American patriotism, and reported on the court cases of Gordon Hirabayashi, Fred Korematsu, and others engaged in civil disobedience. The newspaper was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize in journalism in 1946, and continues to be a leading news source for the Japanese American community news today; and

WHEREAS, In the face of escalating tensions between the US and Japan in the early 1940s, the JACL, then under the direction of President Saburo Kido and Executive Secretary Mike Masaoka, embarked on an aggressive public education campaign to affirm the Japanese American community's commitment to the US government. The JACL authored and disseminated the "Japanese American Creed," which pledged *Nisei* loyalty to the United States. As the JACL testified in front of US Congress in 1941, the creed was read and cited to reinforce *Nisei* appreciation for the US, and to try to prevent potential restrictions on Japanese American rights; and

WHEREAS, Despite their work, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066 on February 19, 1942, leading to the mass internment of over 120,000 leading to the mass internment of over 120,000 Japanese Americans; and

WHEREAS, In the aftermath of World War II, the JACL embarked on a tireless campaign to restore the rights of Japanese Americans, successfully lobbying for the repeal of California's Alien Land Law, which prohibited "aliens ineligible for citizenship" from purchasing and owning agricultural land, as well as for the passage of the McCarran-Walter Act in 1952, which

ended a ban on Japanese immigration and granted a path to citizenship for first generation Japanese Americans; and

WHEREAS, The JACL expanded their scope to include injustices to oppressed communities more broadly and helped found the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights in 1948. Lawyers affiliated with the JACL penned amicus briefs for the seminal desegregation Supreme Court cases *Brown v. Board of Education* and *Loving v. Virginia*; and

WHEREAS, In 1970, the JACL passed a resolution at its national convention calling for reparations for Japanese Americans who were incarcerated and brutalized during World War II, thus launching a fight over the following two decades to secure reparations and a legislative guarantee that no other community would experience the deprivation of constitutional rights that characterized the World War II-era Japanese American existence; and

WHEREAS, Grace Uyehara, who founded the Philadelphia chapter of the JACL, became one of the reparations movement's most prominent advocates, helped create the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians in 1980, which, three years later, recognized the need for the US government to apologize for the violence and harm inflicted upon the Japanese American community, and to offer sufficient financial reparations; and

WHEREAS, The JACL's redress campaign led to the passage of the Civil Liberties Act of 1988, which acknowledged that Executive Order 9066 was an example of "race prejudice, war hysteria, and a failure of political leadership" and provided for the allocation of \$20,000 to each of the 82,219 Japanese Americans who were interned and still alive at the time of the bill's passage. Attached to each check was a formal apology from President George W. Bush, stating, "In enacting a law calling for restitution and offering a sincere apology, your fellow Americans have . . . renewed their commitment to the ideals of freedom, equality and justice"; and

WHEREAS, In 1994, the JACL became the first national membership-based civil rights organization to formally and publicly announce its support of gay marriage, citing its commitment to upholding universal rights for marriage since its vehement opposition to the Cable Act of 1922; and

WHEREAS, The JACL has become one of the most vocal supporters of civil and human rights today, joining a lawsuit challenging the constitutionality of an Arizona statute requiring proof of status citizenships status during police stops in 2010, and writing an amicus brief for the case *Bahlul v. United States* arguing that the Military Commissions Act used to prosecute Guantanamo detainees violates equal protections; and

WHEREAS, Most recently, the JACL condemned the Trump administration's family separation policy and implementation of child prison camps, stating, "This was the legacy of the camps that challenged our community for many years, and still does today. And this is why so many of us stand today in opposition to this practice of separating children from their parents, cognizant of the long term damage that is being done now and upon generations to come"; and

WHEREAS, The JACL holds its 89th annual national convention from July 18-July 22 in the City of Philadelphia, whose local JACL chapter was established in 1947 under the leadership of Grace Uyehara, Tesua Iwasaki, and Hiroshi Uyehara. The JACL's convening will explore the complexities of resistance, reconciliation, and redress throughout Japanese American history and in 2018; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, The the Council of the City of Philadelphia, hereby honors the groundbreaking civil rights legacy of the Japanese American Citizens League on the occasion of its national convention in Philadelphia, and recognizes the 30th anniversary of the organization's successful redress campaign that led to the passage of the Civil Liberties Act of 1988, providing a national apology and financial reparations for Japanese Americans interned during World War II.

FURTHER RESOLVED, That an engrossed copy of this resolution be presented to the Japanese American Citizens League at their 2018 national convention as a sincere expression of the Council of the City of Philadelphia's gratitude, admiration and recognition.

Helen Gym
Councilmember At Large

June 21, 2018