

HR 8023

2025

House Resolution

A resolution recognizing May 15, 2025, as "Josiah T. Walls Day" in the State of Florida.

WHEREAS, Josiah T. Walls was likely born enslaved on December 30, 1842, near Winchester, Virginia, and

WHEREAS, after having been impressed into service for the Confederate Army and captured at the Battle of Yorktown, Josiah Walls voluntarily enlisted in the Union Army in July 1863 as part of the 3rd Infantry Regiment of United States Colored Troops (USCT), was stationed in Union-occupied northern Florida in February 1864, and subsequently transferred to the 35th Regiment of the USCT, rising to the rank of Sergeant Major and serving as an artillery instructor, and

WHEREAS, after his discharge from military service in October 1865, Walls decided to remain in Florida and became a farmer, and

WHEREAS, in 1868, Walls was elected to represent the people of Alachua County in Florida's constitutional convention, playing a role in the drafting of the constitution that was adopted that same year, and was also elected to the Florida House of Representatives, again representing Alachua County, and

WHEREAS, in 1869, Walls was elected to the Florida Senate, representing the 13th District, and

25 WHEREAS, despite allegations that he was unfit for public
26 service due to his status as a former slave, Walls became the
27 first Black Floridian elected to the United States House of
28 Representatives in 1870 and was sworn in as a member of the 42nd
29 Congress on March 4, 1871, where he served on the Committee on
30 the Militia, and

31 WHEREAS, Walls entered Congress as one of seven Black
32 Americans to be the first to serve in our nation's House of
33 Representatives, and although politics in Florida were
34 tumultuous during Reconstruction, filled with overt racism and
35 punctuated by violence, he was reelected to Congress in 1872 and
36 1874, and

37 WHEREAS, a passionate advocate for Florida, Congressman
38 Walls introduced at least 51 bills, including several that
39 directly benefitted this state by calling for a railroad
40 construction land grant, seeking improvement of harbor and river
41 transportation, securing new mail routes, protecting the budding
42 fruit industry, and securing 90,000 acres of land for the
43 Florida Agricultural College, which partnered with the East
44 Florida Seminary at Gainesville to become the University of the
45 State of Florida, now known as the University of Florida, and

46 WHEREAS, after leaving Congress, Walls returned to
47 Gainesville and was appointed to the Alachua County Commission,
48 on which he served as President *pro tempore*, and

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49 WHEREAS, Walls was subsequently reelected to the Florida
50 Senate, serving two terms in 1877 and 1879, and

51 WHEREAS, after once more returning home to Gainesville,
52 Walls was suddenly left in financial ruin after a frost ravaged
53 his farm and killed all of its orange trees, but through his
54 tenacity and determination, Walls persevered and applied his
55 farming experience to a successful career as the administrator
56 of the farm at the Florida Normal College and Industrial College
57 for Colored Students, now known as the Florida Agricultural and
58 Mechanical University, and

59 WHEREAS, Josiah T. Walls died in Tallahassee on May 15,
60 1905, NOW, THEREFORE,

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62 Be It Resolved by the House of Representatives of the State of
63 Florida:

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65 That May 15, 2025, is recognized as "Josiah T. Walls Day"
66 in the State of Florida to honor the life and legacy of Josiah
67 T. Walls on the 120th anniversary of his death.