

1 AN ACT concerning State government.

2 **Be it enacted by the People of the State of Illinois,**
3 **represented in the General Assembly:**

4 Section 1. Short title. This Act may be cited as the
5 Illinois Freedom Trails Commission Act.

6 Section 5. Definitions. As used in this Act:

7 "Commission" means the Illinois Freedom Trails Commission.

8 "Department" means the Department of Natural Resources.

9 Section 10. Establishment of Commission.

10 (a) The Illinois Freedom Trails Commission is established.
11 The purposes of the Commission are to explore, research, and
12 commemorate the journeys of freedom seekers and the sites and
13 landmarks in this State that became the networks of the
14 Underground Railroad.

15 (b) The Commission shall consist of a chairperson and 10
16 additional members appointed by the Governor. The membership
17 may include, but is not limited to, persons who are public
18 officials, scholars, and community-based activists who have
19 knowledge and interest in promoting the work of the
20 Commission. Members shall be broadly representative of the
21 State and the variety of groups interested in promoting the
22 work of the Commission.

1 (c) The terms of the members shall be 4 years. Members
2 shall serve until their successors are appointed and
3 qualified. Any vacancy in the membership of the Commission
4 shall be filled by the Governor for the unexpired term.
5 Members shall serve without compensation, but may be
6 reimbursed for reasonable expenses.

7 (d) Subject to appropriation, the Department shall provide
8 administrative and other support to the Commission.

9 (e) Subject to appropriation, the Commission shall hire a
10 full-time professional staff to implement Commission projects.

11 (f) At its first meeting and annually thereafter, the
12 Commission shall elect from among its members a chairperson
13 and other officers it considers necessary or appropriate.
14 After its first meeting, the Commission shall meet at the call
15 of the chairperson or if requested by 7 or more members.

16 (g) A majority of the members of the Commission constitute
17 a quorum for the transaction of business at a meeting of the
18 Commission. A majority of the members present and serving is
19 required for official action of the Commission.

20 (h) All business that the Commission is authorized to
21 perform shall be conducted at a public meeting of the
22 Commission, held in compliance with the Open Meetings Act.

23 (i) A writing prepared, owned, used, in the possession of,
24 or retained by the Commission in the performance of an
25 official function is subject to the Freedom of Information
26 Act.

1 Section 15. Duties of Commission. The Commission shall
2 have the following duties:

3 (1) to provide resources for individuals and local
4 entities seeking to learn more about the Underground
5 Railroad in Illinois, including:

6 (A) an online resource website, including, but not
7 limited to maps of journeys, historical sites, and
8 conductor cemetery markers;

9 (B) a calendar of related events in this State;

10 (C) research sources and bibliographies;

11 (D) videos and links to videos; and

12 (E) pictures, brief histories, and other materials
13 developed locally and at the State level;

14 (2) collaborate with organizations focusing on the
15 Underground Railroad, including:

16 (A) local and regional Underground Railroad
17 groups;

18 (B) county and regional historical societies;

19 (C) museums, especially museums that focus on
20 slavery and the African American experience;

21 (D) academic programs, especially African American
22 Studies at the college level and history departments;
23 and

24 (E) organizations in African American communities;

25 (3) to create a grant funding program;

1 (4) to work with the National Park Service's Network
2 to Freedom program and serve as a liaison between the
3 National Park Service and local entities;

4 (5) to explore heritage tourism opportunities
5 connecting the locations of freedom seeker journeys and
6 Underground Railroad sites, working with the Illinois
7 Office of Tourism and regional tourism agencies; and

8 (6) to connect freedom seekers and Underground
9 Railroad stories to the range of freedom stories across
10 and throughout the history of Illinois.

11 Section 20. Online database and educational programs.

12 (a) The Commission shall create a publicly available
13 website that includes educational material concerning freedom
14 seekers' journeys on the portions of the Underground Railroad
15 in this State, including:

16 (1) an updated database of freedom seekers and their
17 journeys to and through Illinois;

18 (2) an updated map of the geography of the Underground
19 Railroad in Illinois; and

20 (3) a biographical dictionary of key persons
21 identified with the Underground Railroad in Illinois,
22 including freedom seekers, abolitionist allies, and
23 pro-slavery antagonists.

24 (b) The Commission, in collaboration with the State Board
25 of Education, shall develop and implement an educational

1 program to be made available to every public school in this
2 State. The educational program shall include instruction on:

3 (1) events of African American history, including the
4 African slave trade, slavery in the United States, and the
5 vestiges of slavery in this country;

6 (2) the journeys of freedom seekers and the
7 Underground Railroad in Illinois; and

8 (3) additional resources and activities to be used in
9 February as part of Black History Month.

10 (c) The Commission shall identify scholars in higher
11 education and community-based organizations to engage in
12 research and to be recruited into a speakers' bureau on the
13 Underground Railroad and anti-slavery activity in Illinois.

14 (d) The Commission shall support and publicize local
15 activities in this State that focus on the Underground
16 Railroad, including offering exhibits at meetings of
17 organizations open to spreading knowledge about abolitionism
18 and the Underground Railroad. The Commission shall focus on
19 supporting organizations in African American communities,
20 including assisting members of those communities undertake
21 research related to the history of their communities.

22 Section 25. Historic site and landmark recognition and
23 preservation.

24 (a) The Commission shall develop statewide guidelines for
25 the evaluation of freedom seeker journeys and Underground

1 Railroad sites and landmarks in the State. The Commission
2 shall use the guidelines to determine and maintain a list of
3 freedom seeker journeys and Underground Railroad sites and
4 landmarks and make the list available to the public. The
5 Commission shall include a contact person who represents the
6 site or landmark for each site or landmark included on the
7 list.

8 (b) The Commission shall develop standards and guidelines
9 for historic markers, signage, and other commemorative tools
10 and activities for sites and landmarks listed under subsection
11 (a). The Commission shall also assist sites and landmarks
12 listed under subsection (a) that are threatened with
13 demolition or deterioration.

14 (c) The Commission shall assist individuals and historic
15 preservation organizations in assessing freedom seeker
16 journeys and Underground Railroad sites and landmarks and
17 shall collaborate with the University of Illinois Extension
18 Master Gardener program, the Department, and other partners
19 concerning opportunities for the development of freedom seeker
20 journeys and Underground Railroad sites and landmarks.

21 Section 30. Grant program. Subject to appropriation, the
22 Commission may award grants for the following purposes:

23 (1) to research and identify freedom seeker journeys
24 and Underground Railroad sites and landmarks;

25 (2) to develop heritage tourism and promotional

1 activities on the Underground Railroad, including
2 exhibits, lectures, symposiums, and online materials; and
3 (3) to support an Underground Railroad cemetery marker
4 program.

5 Section 35. Annual report. The Commission shall submit a
6 report to the Governor and the General Assembly by July 1,
7 2026, and each year thereafter. The report shall include, at a
8 minimum, a description of the programs administered by the
9 Commission.

10 Section 40. Rulemaking. After consultation with and
11 written approval by the Department, the Commission may adopt
12 administrative rules as may be necessary to carry out the
13 provisions of this Act in accordance with the Illinois
14 Administrative Procedure Act.

15 Section 45. Repeal. This Act is repealed on January 1,
16 2037.

17 (20 ILCS 3405/22 rep.)

18 Section 90. The Historic Preservation Act is amended by
19 repealing Section 22.

20 Section 99. Effective date. This Act takes effect upon
21 becoming law.