



HR0134

LRB103 31258 LAW 58311 r

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HOUSE RESOLUTION

2 WHEREAS, The members of the Illinois House of
3 Representatives wish to recognize David A. Strother's legacy
4 on voting rights in the State of Illinois and the United
5 States; and

6 WHEREAS, David A. Strother, once widely believed to have
7 been the first Black man to vote in the United States as a
8 result of the addition of the Fifteenth Amendment to the
9 Constitution, was certainly the first to vote in Illinois on
10 April 4, 1870; and

11 WHEREAS, David Strother was born to Henry and Leah in
12 Lexington, Missouri on August 18, 1843, the son of slaves who
13 bought their freedom; he worked as a cook's assistant on a
14 Mississippi steamer; he served as a civilian cook with Company
15 G, 17th Illinois Infantry, of the Union Army during the Civil
16 War; at the urging of 44 local area men of Troop G, he settled
17 in El Paso; he became a barber and set up a chair in the corner
18 of an insurance and justice of the peace's office in January
19 1864; he was soon reunited with his mother and his brother,
20 Charles, who joined him at his new barber shop; and

21 WHEREAS, El Paso then operated under a special charter
22 approved by Governor Richard Oglesby in 1867; Article XV of

1 the U.S. Constitution was declared in effect on March 30,
2 1870, stating that the right of citizens to vote shall not be
3 denied on account of race, color, or previous condition of
4 servitude; the following Monday, April 4, was El Paso's city
5 election, held one day prior to almost all others; and

6 WHEREAS, David Strother, accompanied to the polls by Mayor
7 James Wathen, was initially rebuffed by election officials
8 unaware of the new law; after election judges were shown a copy
9 of the amendment, he returned to the polls at the judges'
10 behest, where apologies were made; he proceeded to cast his
11 vote, and his brother voted soon after; and

12 WHEREAS, News of David Strother's historic vote was spread
13 by Gersh Martin, El Paso's newspaper editor, who telegraphed
14 the news to the Associated Press, and soon people all over the
15 United States were reading about the barber who had cast the
16 then believed first Black vote; and

17 WHEREAS, David Strother continued to live in El Paso for
18 the remainder of his life, passing shortly after suffering a
19 heart attack on March 12, 1905; his loss was keenly felt by the
20 El Paso community, who remembered him for his generosity and
21 gentlemanly conduct; and

22 WHEREAS, David Strother's vote on April 4, 1870 marked him

1 as not only one of the first Black men to vote in the United
2 States but also marked a milestone on the path to equality for
3 our State and the country; therefore, be it

4 RESOLVED, BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE
5 HUNDRED THIRD GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF ILLINOIS, that
6 we recognize David Strother's legacy on voting rights in the
7 State of Illinois and the United States.