ASSEMBLY COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

STATEMENT TO

ASSEMBLY CONCURRENT RESOLUTION No. 145

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: MARCH 17, 2021

The Assembly Community Development and Affairs Committee reports favorably Assembly Concurrent Resolution No. 145.

This constitutional amendment prohibits slavery or involuntary servitude in the State of New Jersey, including as punishment for a crime. Involuntary servitude is the coerced service of one individual for the benefit of another.

Currently, the State Constitution does not include any language concerning slavery or involuntary servitude. The 1776 and 1844 versions of the Constitution also did not include any mention of slavery or involuntary servitude. This amendment adds language to Article I expressly prohibiting slavery and involuntary servitude.

The amendment also directly prohibits slavery and involuntary servitude as punishment for a crime. Prisoners in New Jersey are required to engage in labor, for a minimal pay, while they are incarcerated. The State should not have the power to compel individuals to labor against their will. This amendment ensures that no prisoner in this State would be involuntarily forced into labor, even if the labor performed by the prisoner would be compensated. However, this amendment would not take away voluntary opportunities to work for individuals who have been convicted of a crime. The State recognizes that work can assist in an individual's rehabilitation, improve practical and interpersonal skills that may be useful upon their reintegration with society, and contribute to healthier and safer penal environments.