

ASSEMBLY JOINT RESOLUTION

No. 119

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

219th LEGISLATURE

INTRODUCED FEBRUARY 24, 2020

Sponsored by:

Assemblywoman SERENA DIMASO

District 13 (Monmouth)

SYNOPSIS

Designates January 1 of each year as “New Jersey State Constitution Day.”

CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT

As introduced.



1 **A JOINT RESOLUTION** designating January 1 of each year as “New
2 Jersey State Constitution Day.”
3
4 **WHEREAS**, The development of constitutionalism in New Jersey spans
5 across multiple centuries and three defining constitutional texts –
6 the 1776 State Constitution, 1844 State Constitution, and 1947
7 State Constitution; and
8 **WHEREAS**, On July 2, 1776, New Jersey became the fourth American
9 colony to adopt a constitution declaring independence from Great
10 Britain by a vote of 26 to nine; and
11 **WHEREAS**, As one of the original 13 states, New Jersey’s first
12 constitution in 1776 predates the federal constitution by more than a
13 decade; and
14 **WHEREAS**, New Jersey’s first constitution was composed in five days
15 and although the delegates considered it a temporary charter, the
16 constitution remained New Jersey’s State Constitution for 68 years;
17 and
18 **WHEREAS**, After three failed legislative attempts to call a
19 constitutional convention between 1790 and 1798 and a rejection of
20 a constitutional question by the voters in 1800, the movement for
21 constitutional reform in New Jersey gained momentum following
22 the economic Panic of 1837; and
23 **WHEREAS**, In 1844, a constitutional convention assembled in Trenton,
24 New Jersey between May 14, 1844 and June 9, 1844 with 58
25 delegates in attendance to draft a new State constitution; and
26 **WHEREAS**, The voters overwhelming ratified the 1844 State
27 Constitution, which provided for the election of the Governor by
28 the people and gubernatorial veto power, renamed the Legislative
29 Council as the Senate, and included a separate bill of rights, the
30 basis of today’s Article I; and
31 **WHEREAS**, New Jersey’s 1844 State Constitution shifted governmental
32 power, which had been vested disproportionately in the Legislature
33 under the State’s first charter, to the executive branch; and
34 **WHEREAS**, Despite the important reforms of the 1844 State
35 Constitution, the structure and functioning of the court system, the
36 elimination of equal representation for counties in the Senate, and
37 providing a simpler method for amending the constitution was not
38 addressed; and
39 **WHEREAS**, By the 1940s, a succession of three governors, Governors
40 Charles Edison, Walter E. Edge, and Alfred E. Driscoll, made
41 reforming the century-old 1844 State Constitution a high priority to
42 confront modern problems in postwar state governments; and
43 **WHEREAS**, In the summer of 1947, after voters approved to call a
44 constitutional convention by a five-to-one margin; a constitutional
45 convention assembled at the Rutgers campus in New Brunswick,
46 New Jersey; and
47 **WHEREAS**, Building on the unsuccessful constitutional revisions
48 prepared during the Edison and Edge Administrations, around

1 which a consensus had now developed, the 81 delegate convention
2 produced New Jersey's current constitution, the 1947 State
3 Constitution; and

4 **WHEREAS**, The 1947 State Constitution was ratified overwhelming by
5 the voters and took effect on January 1, 1948; and

6 **WHEREAS**, The 1947 State Constitution modernized the bill of rights
7 to provide equal rights for women and an anti-discrimination
8 provision, strengthened the Office of the Governor, reorganized and
9 unified the judicial system under the New Jersey Supreme Court,
10 and modified the constitutional amendment process; and

11 **WHEREAS**, New Jersey's constitutional history represents centuries of
12 constitutional reform and development that produced a strong
13 governorship, formidable Legislature, and unified judicial system
14 that transformed the New Jersey State Constitution into a model of
15 state constitutionalism; and

16 **WHEREAS**, It is fitting and proper to designate January 1 of each year,
17 the day the current constitution became effective, as "New Jersey
18 State Constitution Day" to acknowledge and celebrate New Jersey's
19 constitutional history and educate New Jerseyans about the rights,
20 privileges, and responsibilities the State Constitution affords; now,
21 therefore,

22
23 **BE IT RESOLVED** *by the Senate and General Assembly of the*
24 *State of New Jersey:*

25
26 1. January 1 of each year shall be designated as "New Jersey
27 State Constitution Day" to acknowledge and celebrate New Jersey's
28 constitutional history and raise public awareness of the rights,
29 privileges, and responsibilities the State Constitution affords.

30
31 2. The Governor is respectfully requested to issue a
32 proclamation each year calling upon public officials and the citizens
33 of this State to observe "New Jersey State Constitution Day" with
34 appropriate activities and programs.

35
36 3. This joint resolution shall take effect immediately.

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39 STATEMENT

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41 This joint resolution designates January 1 of each year as "New
42 Jersey State Constitution Day." Historically, the development of
43 constitutionalism in New Jersey spans across multiple centuries and
44 three defining constitutional texts – the 1776 State Constitution,
45 1844 State Constitution, and 1947 State Constitution.

46 On July 2, 1776, New Jersey became the fourth American colony
47 to adopt a constitution declaring independence from Great Britain
48 by a vote of 26 to nine. As one of the original 13 states, New

1 Jersey's first constitution in 1776 predates the federal constitution
2 by more than a decade. New Jersey's second constitution, the 1844
3 State Constitution, was overwhelmingly ratified by the voters in 1844
4 and shifted governmental power to the executive branch. The 1844
5 State Constitution provided for the election of the Governor by the
6 people and gubernatorial veto power, renamed the Legislative
7 Council as the Senate, and included a separate bill of rights, the
8 basis of today's Article I. New Jersey's current State Constitution,
9 the 1947 State Constitution further solidified New Jersey's State
10 institutions by strengthening the Office of the Governor,
11 reorganizing and unifying the judicial system under the New Jersey
12 Supreme Court, and modifying the constitutional amendment
13 process. The 1947 State Constitution also modernized the bill of
14 rights to provide equal rights for women and an anti-discrimination
15 provision.

16 New Jersey's constitutional history represents centuries of
17 constitutional reform and development that transformed the New
18 Jersey State Constitution from a relative unknown document to a
19 model of state constitutionalism. Since January 1, 1948 was the
20 effective date of New Jersey's current constitution, it is fitting and
21 proper to designate January 1 of each year as "New Jersey State
22 Constitution Day" to acknowledge and celebrate New Jersey's
23 constitutional history and raise public awareness of the rights,
24 privileges, and responsibilities the State Constitution affords.