

# **Senate Approves Montigny Bill to Honor Frederick Douglass' 200th Birthday and Declare February 14th as Frederick Douglass Day**

Today, the Senate has passed Senate Assistant Majority Leader Mark C. Montigny's legislation creating an annual day to honor Frederick Douglass for his contributions to Massachusetts and the nation.

Douglass was born into slavery circa 1818, learning how to read and write and later teaching others, despite the threats such activities risked. In the fall of 1838, Douglass escaped north to freedom via the Underground Railroad on a route that took him through New York and Rhode Island before settling in New Bedford. In New Bedford he adopted the surname Douglass with the help of Nathan and Polly Johnson, well-known abolitionists whose New Bedford home still stands as a National Historic Landmark. New Bedford's vibrant abolitionist community allowed Douglass immeasurable opportunities as he became involved with the local paper and began speaking at meetings. In Massachusetts, Douglass sharpened his oratorical skills that would make him one of the most sought after abolitionist speakers of his time.

Montigny's legislation endorsed by the Senate today declares Douglass' chosen birthday of February 14th as Frederick Douglass Day in the Commonwealth.

"Frederick Douglass is one of the greatest human rights leaders since the founding of our nation, and his formative years in New Bedford helped shape what became a remarkable

legacy in freedom, equality and justice,” said Senator Montigny, who has secured significant annual funding towards the New Bedford Historical Society to promote and honor Douglass’ legacy. “It is imperative that we recognize the great contributions he made to New Bedford, the nation, and the world, and this is but one way we can honor his life’s work that has yet to receive the full appreciation it deserves in New Bedford and Massachusetts.”

During his tenure in the Senate, Montigny has worked closely with the New Bedford Historical Society, whose mission is to celebrate the history and culture of people of color and to ensure current and future generations can appreciate their important legacy that has shaped our democracy. Funding secured by Montigny has helped the Society collect, preserve and commemorate this history, including the significance of New Bedford on Douglass’ early formative years.