

HARVARD LAW SCHOOL STUDENT BODY SPRING TERM TWO THOUSAND TWENTY

RESOLUTION NO. Res-203-007

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A RESOLUTION TO: RECOGNIZE BELINDA HALL

THE STUDENT BODY OF HARVARD LAW SCHOOL ENACTS:

WHEREAS, Harvard Law School originally came into being due to a donation of money by the Royall family, a colonial family who owned slaves and who were heavily involved in the slave trade; AND

WHEREAS, there is thus a direct connection between money derived from the institution of slavery and the formation of our law school, such that it has been claimed that “the labor of slaves underwrote the teaching of law in Cambridge;”¹ AND

WHEREAS, HLS has recently begun to distance itself from the Royall family through such actions as retiring the old HLS shield which bore the Royall family crest and recent Deans declining the Royall Chair, which has traditionally been held by the Dean of HLS; AND

WHEREAS, former Harvard President Drew Faust remarked upon the retiring of the old HLS Shield, “How fitting that you should begin your bicentennial with this ceremony reminding us that the path toward justice is neither smooth nor straight. Let us dedicate ourselves to the clear-eyed view of history that will enable us to build a more just future in honor of the stolen lives we memorialize here;” AND

WHEREAS, HLS students have since 2015 argued that we must not only distance ourselves from the Royalls, but also embrace those whom the Royalls deprived of their freedom and whose labor allowed this school to come into being, by naming a central fixture of our campus after one of those enslaved persons, a woman named Belinda Sutton, whose successful petitioning of the Massachusetts General Court in 1783 for a pension from the Royall estate represents both an act of special courage in asserting her rights as well as a landmark endorsement of a novel legal remedy; AND

WHEREAS, HLS students have not wavered in their support for this proposal since the Reclaim movement introduced the idea in 2015, demonstrating during the 2019 Student Government spring elections that this remains an idea with widespread support within the student body; AND

WHEREAS, the vast majority of students already refer to the lounge as “Belinda Hall”; AND

WHEREAS, the current Student Government leadership has made a sustained effort to lobby the administration to take action to recognize Belinda Hall in some capacity, but without any success; AND

WHEREAS we understand that the Haas Lounge was named after the Haas family after they made a sizeable donation to HLS, and we also understand that the administration believes that officially changing the name would 1) require them to forfeit this donation, and 2) discourage future such philanthropy; AND

WHEREAS, Student Government represents the student body, and the student body is an independent entity that can take action regardless of and independent from what the administration chooses to do, and the act of

¹ Sven Beckert, Katherine Stevens, et al., *Harvard and Slavery: Seeking a Forgotten History*, Harvard University (2011), p. 11.

calling spaces on our campus what we as a student body wish to call them is within our rights and does not impair any contractual understanding between the Haas family and HLS; AND

WHEREAS, independent, sustained, and coordinated student action to stand up for an ideal is in our estimation a far more powerful thing than a simple administrative naming change; AND

WHEREAS, Belinda Hall is an idea that transcends an inscription on a plaque on a wall, but rather lives on in our collective acknowledgement of what we as a student body recognize to be justice, and that it is just and proper for Student Government to recognize this and memorialize four years of student activism around this;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, the Harvard Law School Student Government recognizes “Belinda Hall” as a legitimate name within the student body for the lounge between Wasserstein and Caspersen.

BE IT ALSO RESOLVED, the Harvard Law School Student Government will not relent in its fight for full recognition of Belinda Hall and support for student activism.

PASSED IN THE STUDENT COUNCIL: March 4th, 2020

VOTE TOTALS:

11 YES

1 NO

 ABSTAIN