House of Representatives

File No. 782

General Assembly

January Session, 2023

(Reprint of File No. 548)

House Joint Resolution No. 34
As Amended by House Amendment
Schedule "A"

Approved by the Legislative Commissioner
May 12, 2023

RESOLUTION CONCERNING CERTAIN WITCHCRAFT CONVICTIONS IN COLONIAL CONNECTICUT.

Resolved by this Assembly:

WHEREAS, the courts in the early British colonies of Connecticut and New Haven indicted at least thirty-four women and men for the alleged crimes of witchcraft and familiarities with the devil and convicted twelve of them, executing eleven, and it is now accepted by the historical profession and society as a whole that all the accused were innocent of such charges, and

WHEREAS, legal procedures differed at the time and many practices of the Colonial courts would not meet modern American standards of proof, so that the miscarriage of justice was facilitated by such procedures, and

WHEREAS, the status of women was radically different than it is today, and misogyny played a large part in the trials and in denying defendants their rights and dignity, and

WHEREAS, community strife and panic combined with overwhelming fear and superstition led to these accusations of alleged witchcraft and the subsequent suffering of those accused.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that all of the formally convicted and executed are absolved of all crimes of witchcraft and familiarities with the devil. The legislature specifically absolves the following people believed to have been convicted and executed for the crimes of witchcraft and familiarities with the devil: Alice Young in 1647, Mary Johnson in 1648, Joan Carrington in 1651, John Carrington in 1651, Goodwife Bassett in 1651, Goodwife Knapp in 1653, Lydia Gilbert in 1654, Mary Sanford in 1662, Nathaniel Greensmith in 1663, Rebecca Greensmith in 1663, and Mary Barnes in 1663; and one Elizabeth Seager convicted and reprieved in 1665.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that those who were indicted for the crimes of witchcraft and familiarities with the devil, forced to flee, banished or even acquitted continued to live with their reputations destroyed and their family names tarnished, will have their reputations restored and no longer have disgrace attached to their names, now, being in good standing in the state of Connecticut. The following indicted for the crimes of witchcraft and familiarities with the devil who were not convicted but still suffered greatly after indictments were: Goodwife Bailey in 1655, Nicholas Bailey in 1655, Elizabeth Godman in 1655, Elizabeth Garlick in 1658, Margaret Jennings in 1661, Nicholas Jennings in 1661, Judith Varlet in 1662, Andrew Sanford in 1662, William Ayers in 1662, Judith Ayers in 1662, James Wakely in 1662, Katherine Harrison in 1668 and 1669, William Graves in 1667, Elizabeth Clawson in 1692, Hugh Crosia in 1692, Mercy Disborough in 1692, Mary Harvey in 1692, Hannah Harvey in 1692, Mary Staples in 1692, Winifred Benham in 1697, and Winifred Benham Jr. in 1697.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the State of Connecticut apologizes to the descendants of all those who were indicted for the crimes of witchcraft and familiarities with the devil, convicted and executed and for the harm done to the accused persons' posterity to the

present day, and acknowledges the trauma and shame that wrongfully continued to affect the families of the accused.

The following Fiscal Impact Statement and Bill Analysis are prepared for the benefit of the members of the General Assembly, solely for purposes of information, summarization and explanation and do not represent the intent of the General Assembly or either chamber thereof for any purpose. In general, fiscal impacts are based upon a variety of informational sources, including the analyst's professional knowledge. Whenever applicable, agency data is consulted as part of the analysis, however final products do not necessarily reflect an assessment from any specific department.

OFA Fiscal Note

State Impact: None

Municipal Impact: None

Explanation

This resolution expresses contrition for colonial action as such it does not result in a fiscal impact to the state or municipalities.

The Out Years

State Impact: None

Municipal Impact: None

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OLR Bill Analysis

HJ 34 (as amended by House "A")

RESOLUTION CONCERNING CERTAIN WITCHCRAFT CONVICTIONS IN COLONIAL CONNECTICUT.

SUMMARY

The Office of Legislative Research does not analyze Resolutions.

COMMITTEE ACTION

Judiciary Committee

Joint Favorable
Yea 28 Nay 9 (03/27/2023)