PROCLAMATION
HONORING THE RICH AND DIVERSE BLACK HISTORY
OF ELIZABETH CITY, NC

WHEREAS, each year in the United States, February is dedicated as Black History Month. What began as the grassroots effort of African-American historian Carter G. Woodson has grown into a national time to honor the triumphs and struggles of African Americans throughout history; and

WHEREAS, it should be noted that North Carolina's African American heritage is also rich and diverse. In slavery and in freedom, black residents have shaped state politics and institutions, literary traditions, religious practice, and the lives of their fellow North Carolinians. The African American struggle for civil rights and equality touched all regions of our great state; and

WHEREAS, Elizabeth City and Pasquotank County also have been and continue to be the home of notable black citizens and institutions that have helped shape the course of local history. Although the list is long, some of the notable people and places are worthy of special recognition; and

WHEREAS, on March 3, 1891, Hugh Cale, an African-American representative in the N.C. General Assembly from Pasquotank County, sponsored House Bill 383, which established a normal school for teachers and laid the groundwork for the Elizabeth City State University we know today; and

WHEREAS, ECSU'S first leader, Peter W. Moore, who was called a Principal (subsequent leaders would be called President, then Chancellor), served this fine institution as Principal and then President until his retirement as President Emeritus, on July 1, 1928; and

WHEREAS, Roanoke Institute was organized in 1896 by the local black Baptist churches of the Roanoke Association as a private school to train ministers and continues its service to this day; and

WHEREAS, Elizabeth City's first black church, now Mt. Lebanon A.M.E. Zion Church, was founded in 1850 and from 1865 until 1896 all of the black congregations organized in Elizabeth City were located there. Mt. Lebanon was soon followed by Olive Branch Missionary Baptist Church in 1865 and Corner Stone Missionary Baptist Church in 1888, and all still play significant roles in the lives of our residents today; and

WHEREAS, Wittier Crockett Witherspoon, a true gentleman and scholar, devoted his life to improving interracial relations in Elizabeth City, and in 1987 was elected to the Pasquotank County Board of Commissioners as its first African American member to serve in the board's 300 year history; and

WHEREAS, a descendant of slaves, Wanda McLean worked night and day for months to submit documentation to the National Park Service regarding several local Underground Railroad escape routes, which led to the Great Dismal Swamp and the Pasquotank River being designated in 2003 and 2004 as parts of the Underground

Railroad, the system of routes and hiding places used by slaves in the mid-1800s to escape to freedom; and

WHEREAS, Reverend Doctor Charles L. Foster's extensive career in public service culminated when he was elected as the first African-American mayor of Elizabeth City in 2005, paving the way for others to follow in his footsteps.

NOW, THEREFORE, be it proclaimed that I, Joseph W. Peel, Mayor of the City of Elizabeth City, being joined by all members of the City Council, do hereby recognize and pay homage to the important role that African-American citizens have played throughout the history of Elizabeth City both past and present.

THIS, the 22nd day of February 2016.

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Joseph W. Peel
Mayor

Attest:

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Vivian D. White, CMC/NCCMC
City Clerk