

TO: Maryland Senate

Re: Bill SB 142 – Establishment of Maryland Emancipation Day as a Legal Holiday

March 9, 2021

Maryland is the first state south of the Mason-Dixon Line to have freed the slaves within its borders by popular vote. This was signed into law by the Governor of Maryland on Nov. 1, 1864.

We are the **first**, so why do so many people and organizations in our wonderful state of Maryland celebrate Juneteenth, marking 1. The last people to be freed, and 2. The state of Texas.

As a scholar with a Masters degree in American Studies, I have made a primary source study of the freeing of enslaved people in Maryland, and I can assure you that there is plenty of original source material to back up the claim that we are the first.

A recent book that was reviewed in the Washington Post claimed that there were six Southern states that freed their slaves in the last year of the War. This does not refute my original statement that Maryland is the first. As to the other five:

1. Missouri freed its slaves on January 11, 1865 by vote of delegates, not by popular vote
2. West Virginia, June 20, 1863 – gradual, not immediate emancipation
3. Louisiana, 4. Arkansas, 5. Tennessee – slaves only freed in the part of the state governed by the military, and by military government, not vote of the people.

On May 16, 2013, the Governor of Maryland signed a bill making Maryland Emancipation Day, November 1, the official day recognizing the emancipation of slaves in Maryland. Not many people or groups have recognized this or switched from celebrating Juneteenth. We need something stronger, something to draw their attention that they cannot ignore. We need an official state holiday.

Susan Cooke Soderberg  
19313 Liberty Mill Rd.  
Germantown, MD 20874  
301-814-5048  
soderberg@md.net