



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

House Bill 227

Testimony to be offered to the Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee
March 24, 2022

Good Afternoon Chairman Pinsky, Madam Vice-Chair Kagan and members of the Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee. For the record, I am Delegate Andrea Fletcher Harrison here to present HB 227, An Act concerning State Government – Legal and Employee Holiday-Juneteenth National Freedom Day, respectfully requesting a favorable report on this bill.

As we know, Juneteenth commemorates the date, June 19th, 1865--two and half years after the Emancipation Proclamation and two months after the end of the Civil War--when hundreds of thousands of enslaved men and women in Texas finally learned they had been freed. It is an important milestone in American culture. It represents the resilience and valiant efforts of black Americans.

On June 17, 2021, President Joe Biden signed the Juneteenth National Independence Day Act making June 19th a US federal Holiday commemorating the end of slavery in the United States. All but three states in the country recognize Juneteenth with Maryland being a part of the 47 who acknowledge it. Sponsored by former Delegate Melvin Stukes and signed into law in 2014, it is considered a day of commemoration. In the final "Whereas" clause in Chapter 602 (House Bill 549, 2014) which made Juneteenth a commemorative day in the State of Maryland, it reads, "Whereas, Juneteenth National Freedom Day, which recalls how slaves hated slavery and celebrated its abolishment with excitement and great joy, serves as a reminder to all Americans of the status and importance of Americans of African descent; now therefore...Be it enacted..." that the Governor annually shall proclaim June 19th as Juneteenth National Freedom Day. Outside of recognition, little effort has been made in Maryland to honor and appreciate the adversities of blacks who built this state by way of their servitude.

While joyful black Americans celebrate Juneteenth every year, it's not always welcomed or celebrated outside the black community. In the likeness of MLK day, it's time for us to celebrate this as a paid state holiday no matter your racial identity. The abolishment of slavery didn't signify the end of racism, but the start of black people's fight with systematic oppression. The

road to equality is long, but Juneteenth should serve as a reminder that current and future generations are the solution. Four hundred and two years after the abolishment of slavery, 40 million Black Americans continue to fight against the racism their ancestors faced. Juneteenth is an important day to recognize, celebrate, observe, and realize we have not properly addressed our past as a state, let alone as a nation.

Making Juneteenth a state holiday, joining Virginia, Texas, New York, Pennsylvania, and Massachusetts, is a step that we as lawmakers can do to show we recognize, empathize and value the plight of black people in Maryland, and appreciate their past and continued contributions to our great State. Becoming a state holiday will not merely give employees a day off, but will give residents a day to think of the future we want while remembering the inequities of the past. It will help us all reflect on how far we have come as a nation and how much more we must do for humankind.

With this being said, Chairman Pinsky and members of the committee, I again respectfully request a favorable report on HB 227.

Respectfully submitted by,

Delegate Andrea Harrison