



STATE OF MARYLAND
OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL

FACSIMILE NO.

WRITER'S DIRECT DIAL NO.
443-463-0751

February 1, 2022

TO: The Honorable Shane E. Pendergrass
Chair, Health and Government Operations Committee

FROM: Office of the Attorney General

RE: House Bill 227: State Government – Legal and Employee Holiday – Juneteenth
National Independence Day (SUPPORT)

The Office of the Attorney General submits this position paper in support of House Bill 227, which would establish “Juneteenth National Independence Day” as a State legal and State employee holiday.

Juneteenth National Independence Day is a cultural celebration to commemorate the end of slavery in America. Although President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863, which freed all enslaved persons in the United States, it was not fully enforced until two and a half years later. On June 19, 1865, federal troops went to Galveston, Texas and advised the last remaining slaves that they were free. Juneteenth has become a significant holiday for African Americans to mark the true end of slavery and symbolize the triumph of African Americans and their ancestors. Juneteenth is a significant milestone in America’s history that should be recognized in Maryland.

On June 16, 2021, the United States Congress enacted legislation declaring Juneteenth National Independence Day as a legal public holiday. The next day, Governor Hogan announced the closure of state government agencies and offices in honor of Juneteenth; the University System

of Maryland, similarly, gave its employees administrative leave in recognition of the new national holiday.¹ Today, Juneteenth is celebrated in over 205 cities, recognized in 49 states, and designated as a paid holiday in seven states.

Maryland should follow the lead of the federal government and formally adopt Juneteenth as a legal holiday to allow its citizens to celebrate the end of slavery and reflect upon its legacy. Acknowledging the continuing impact of slavery is an important step in promoting racial healing in our communities, not only for those who are descendants of slaves, but for all Maryland citizens.

For these reasons, the Office of the Attorney General urges a favorable report on House Bill 227.

¹ See <https://governor.maryland.gov/2021/06/17/governor-hogan-announces-state-closures-for-juneteenth-holiday/> and Maryland's Public System of Higher Education, *Statement by USM Chancellor Jay A. Perman on the Juneteenth Holiday* (March 31, 2021), <https://www.usmd.edu/newsroom/news/2146>.