



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

House Bill 448

Testimony to be offered to the Health and Government Operations Committee  
March 16, 2021

Good Afternoon Madam Chair, Madam Vice-Chair and members of the Health and Government Operations Committee. For the record, I am Andrea Fletcher Harrison, here to present HB 448, 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 19<sup>th</sup>, 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 resistance and resilience of black people in America.

All but four states in the country recognize Juneteenth as a day of recognition of the Emancipation of enslaved people here in America. Maryland is one of those states. 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 19<sup>th</sup> as Juneteenth National Freedom Day. But to date, there has been very little done to truly appreciate the blood, sweat and tears of those blacks who built this state by way of their servitude.

While there have been Juneteenth celebrations to occur around the country, they have not always been welcomed. It's time for more of us to celebrate this as a paid holiday, whether or not you identify as Black. Just because we abolished slavery doesn't mean the work to end systemic racism has ended. Juneteenth should serve as a reminder that it's up to all of us to be part of the solution.

The recent deaths of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd sparked a revolution and these tragedies have forced people around the world to open their eyes to the plight of Black people in this country. It is important to recognize that Black Americans have been fighting for justice since this country's inception. The struggles of the systemic racism black people have talked about consistently—the overt and covert displays of racism—and the suffering that quite frankly many blacks have silently endured has affected this nation and continues to this day. Juneteenth is an important day to recognize, celebrate, observe and realize we have not fully addressed our past in a way that needs to be done.

Making Juneteenth a paid state holiday, joining Virginia, Texas, New York and Pennsylvania, is a step that we as lawmakers can do to show we recognize, understand and value the plight of black people in Maryland, and appreciate their past and continued contributions to our great State.

With this being said, Madam Chair and members of the committee, I again respectfully request a favorable report on HB 448.

Respectfully submitted by,

Delegate Andrea Harrison