



POSITION STATEMENT

TESTIMONY PRESENTED TO THE HEALTH AND GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS COMMITTEE

**HOUSE BILL 448 – STATE GOVERNMENT - LEGAL AND EMPLOYEE HOLIDAY –
JUNETEENTH NATIONAL FREEDOM DAY**

Sponsor: Delegate Harrison

March 16, 2021

**DONALD C. FRY
PRESIDENT & CEO
GREATER BALTIMORE COMMITTEE**

Position: Support

The Greater Baltimore Committee supports House Bill 448, which would designate June 19th as Juneteenth National Freedom Day and would designate that day as a state legal holiday and state employee holiday.

While Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation on September 22, 1862, this order was not recognized by southern states who had joined the Confederacy and thus did not have an immediate effect on the enslaved peoples there. Even when the American Civil War ended, the emancipation of slaves was often dependent on the presence of Union soldiers to enforce the order. Thus, emancipation was a process that was both sluggish and inconsistent as Union troops gradually made their way through southern states. On June 19th, 1865, Union Army General Gordon Granger arrived in Galveston, Texas to enforce the emancipation of Texas' slaves.

Juneteenth has come to symbolize for many African Americans the triumph of human spirit over the cruelty of slavery. In 1997, the United States Senate adopted a joint resolution recognizing Juneteenth as the true Independence Day for African American citizens, and in recent years both the Senate and the United States House of Representatives have passed annual resolutions commemorating June 19 as Juneteenth Independence Day. The holiday is celebrated annually in more than 25 cities and commemorated in 47 states, including Maryland. It is designated as a paid state holiday in Texas, and has been declared a state holiday in New York and New Jersey beginning in 2021.

The Greater Baltimore Committee contends that it is important to the descendants of those freed blacks and slaves, all African Americans citizens of Maryland, and all citizens of Maryland regardless of their racial or ethnic background to recognize this pivotal moment in our country's history. As such, the GBC supports efforts to have Juneteenth formally recognized by the State.

For these reasons, the Greater Baltimore Committee urges a favorable report on House Bill 448.

The Greater Baltimore Committee (GBC) is a non-partisan, independent, regional business advocacy organization comprised of hundreds of businesses -- large, medium and small -- educational institutions, nonprofit organizations and foundations located in Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Carroll, Harford, and Howard counties as well as Baltimore City. The GBC is a 66-year-old, private-sector membership organization with a rich legacy of working with government to find solutions to problems that negatively affect our competitiveness and viability.

GREATER BALTIMORE COMMITTEE

111 South Calvert Street • Suite 1700 • Baltimore, Maryland • 21202-6180

(410) 727-2820 • www.gbc.org