

LD 183 An Act To Establish Juneteenth as a Paid State Holiday

JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

FEBRUARY 17, 2021

10:00 am

State House

Chair Baldacci, Chair Matlack, and distinguished members of the committee on State and Local Government, my name is Jeff McCabe, Director of Politics & Legislation for the Maine Service Employees Association Service Employees International Union, Local 1989 (MSEA-SEIU, Local 1989). Maine Service Employees Association is a labor union that represents approximately 13,000 workers and retirees, mainly in the public sector, statewide.

I am here today in support of LD 183 An Act To Establish Juneteenth as a Paid State Holiday. Holidays allow us as citizens to reflect on the importance of a date and remind us of the important history associated with an event. As a parent of young children, holidays allow for our family to talk about history. Most importantly it gives me a chance to hear how my children view and understand the events associated with that holiday. As someone in the labor movement, holidays allow us to create teachable moments to talk with workers and families about the sacrifice of a certain day and those events in a way that brings people together. Understanding history and talking about it is important and something we should promote socially and educationally.

A Juneteenth Holiday would create a day to recognize the events on June 19, 1865, when Major General Gordon Granger arrived in Galveston, Texas and informed Black people there that they had finally won their freedom. The Emancipation Proclamation was issued by United States President Abraham Lincoln on September 22, 1862. Currently, Juneteenth is a celebration rather than a holiday, and is not widely known or discussed. Being a state holiday would make it official and would create a day to allow for discussion, teaching and learning about a very important day in our nation's history.

Maine itself has a complex and often not talked about or taught history in the ongoing legitimacy of slavery in our nation. In order for Maine to become a state in 1820, a compromise was needed, and a slave state also had to be admitted, and thus was the Missouri compromise. Our state's history from our very founding is connected to slavery.

In the year 2021, let us move forward as a state by celebrating Juneteenth, honoring African American freedom and by doing so creating space for ongoing dialogue, progress, and respect of all cultures. I am happy to answer any questions and I look forward to seeing the committee taking a supportive vote.