

February 17, 2021

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

Senator Joseph Baldacci, Chair

Representative Ann Matlack, Chair

Honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government

We are June Thornton—Marsh, a resident of Waterville, Jan Froehlich, a Falmouth resident, and Marlena Hatem, a Falmouth resident. June is of African-heritage, and Jan and Marlena are white. We are the co-owners of *Transforming Racial Lines*, an organization whose mission is to transform the many lines that divide and separate humans by learning the skills of listening, loving, and lifting spirits when you can.

We support LD 183 for the following reasons:

Juneteenth, also known by many as Black Independence Day, is an unofficial holiday where many African-Americans, with many others, make time to recognize the day that righted the wrong of slavery by emancipating those who had lost their freedom and their freedom to be. This day is deeply personal, primarily among many African-Americans, who are the present-day descendants of slaves, and their allies, which calls for putting our focused attention on a pivotal moment in our collective history -- the enslavement and freedom of Black people.

Juneteenth is a day of reflection and engagement.

- It is a day to reflect and engage with others on how slavery was the mechanism that put in place the entrapment of a group of people. It is not merely a day to celebrate when slaves were freed from the enslavement perpetrated on them. It is a day to reflect and engage with others on what contributed and caused white people to deprive Black and dark-skinned people of their freedom in the first place.
- It is a day to reflect and engage with others on what differentiates Juneteenth from the other holiday of independence, the Fourth of July. This day celebrates when the people of the 13 original colonies declared themselves to be a united, free, and independent people and no longer subject and subordinate to Britain. The holiday of Black Independence, Juneteenth, celebrates when slaves were no longer subject and subordinate to white slave owners and became a united, free, and independent people. Black Independence Day holds out the idea that slaves were freed.
- It is a day to reflect and engage with others on the true meaning of freedom and independence as an ideal and if the descendants of slaves are genuinely free.

- It is a day to reflect and engage with others on how the Fourth of July, Independence Day, may be a marker of white Americans' progress and how Juneteenth, Black Independence Day, may not be a marker for the advancement of African- Americans. Juneteenth is a day to reflect and engage with others to celebrate the freedom of slaves. Yet, we also need to acknowledge the current reality that Black bodies are not free from random violence and murder, not free from disproportionate rates of poverty, not free from poor quality food and inadequate housing, and not free from disproportionate rates of illness and death.
- It is a day to reflect and engage with others on how, as long as there continues to be an estimated 38-46 million people worldwide who are victims of modern slavery, none of us are indeed free.

Our most compelling reason for asking for the passage of LD 183 is it may provide opportunities to deepen awareness of the ongoing damage of anti-Black racism and to deepen engagement within and across racial lines.

We urge the committee to pass LD183 and set aside June 19<sup>th</sup> as a paid state holiday where the people of Maine gather with family, friends, and loved ones in their communities to reflect and engage on the meaning of Juneteenth and find unity in our desires and actions toward racial justice.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. Thank you, Representative Richard Evans and Representative Rachel Talbot Ross, for co-sponsoring this bill.

In Warm Regard,

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