

2021 -- H 6447

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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2021

HOUSE RESOLUTION

RECOGNIZING "JUNETEENTH NATIONAL FREEDOM DAY" ON JUNE 19, 2021

Introduced By: Representatives Williams, Shekarchi, Blazejewski, Alzate, Vella-Wilkinson, Hull, Biah, J Lombardi, Henries, and Morales

Date Introduced: June 17, 2021

Referred To: House read and passed

1 WHEREAS, Juneteenth originated in Galveston, Texas, on June 19, 1865, in celebration
2 of the emancipation of those who had been enslaved in America. The tradition of marking the end
3 of slavery with Emancipation Day celebrations had an earlier beginning in South Carolina on
4 January 1, 1863, in recognition of the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation. Even earlier
5 celebrations of emancipation date back to when slavery was abolished throughout the British
6 Empire on August 1, 1834; and

7 WHEREAS, Each year after 1834, on August 1, major emancipation celebrations were
8 organized across the West Indies and American cities with free African heritage populations. The
9 Rhode Island cities of Providence, Newport and East Providence were early sites for major
10 Emancipation Day celebrations and festivals dating back to the 1850s. During the 20th century,
11 tens of thousands of people attended Emancipation Day events at Roger Williams Park, Rocky
12 Point, and Crescent Park; and

13 WHEREAS, Juneteenth is part of a number of emancipation celebrations that date back
14 to the early 19th century; and

15 WHEREAS, Also known as Emancipation Day, Emancipation Celebration, Freedom
16 Day, Jun-Jun, and Juneteenth, Juneteenth National Freedom Day commemorates the strong
17 survival instinct of African Americans who were first brought to this country stacked in the
18 bottom of slave ships in a month-long journey across the Atlantic Ocean known as the Middle
19 Passage; and

20 WHEREAS, Approximately eleven and a half million Africans survived the voyage to

1 the New World, with the number that died likely greater, and those who did survive were
2 subjected to whipping, castration, branding, and rape, and were forced to submit to slavery for
3 more than two hundred years after their arrival in the United States; and

4 WHEREAS, Events in the history of the United States that led to the Civil War of 1861
5 centered around sectional differences between the North and South that were based on the
6 economic and social divergence caused by the existence of slavery; and

7 WHEREAS, Abraham Lincoln was inaugurated as President of the United States in 1861,
8 and as President, he believed and stated that the paramount object of the Civil War was to save
9 the Union rather than to save or destroy slavery; and

10 WHEREAS, But Lincoln also stated his belief that all men everywhere should be free,
11 thus adding to the growing anticipation of slaves that their ultimate liberation was at hand; and

12 WHEREAS, In 1862, the first clear sign that the end of slavery was imminent came when
13 laws abolishing slavery in the territories of Oklahoma, Nebraska, Colorado, and New Mexico
14 were passed; and

15 WHEREAS, In September of that same year, President Lincoln warned the eleven
16 rebellious Confederate States that if they did not return to the Union by January 1, 1863, he
17 would declare their slaves forever free via the celebrated Emancipated Proclamation; and

18 WHEREAS, Enforcement of the Emancipation Proclamation, however, only occurred in
19 Confederate States once they were under Union Army control and Congress subsequently passed
20 the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution on January 31, 1865, abolishing slavery
21 throughout the United States and its territories; and

22 WHEREAS, News of this action reached the states at different times, and it was not until
23 June 19 of 1865, that the message of freedom reached the slaves in Texas, Oklahoma, Louisiana,
24 Arkansas, and California; and

25 WHEREAS, Spontaneous celebrations erupted throughout the country when African-
26 Americans learned of their freedom; and

27 WHEREAS, Juneteenth National Freedom Day celebrates the abolishment of slavery
28 with excitement and great joy and is a reminder to all Americans of the status and importance that
29 Americans of African descent hold as American citizens; now, therefore be it

30 RESOLVED, That this House of Representatives of the State of Rhode Island hereby
31 urges the citizens of the State of Rhode Island to join in recognizing the historical significance of
32 Juneteenth Independence Day and the observance of Juneteenth National Freedom Day on June
33 19th; and be it further

34 RESOLVED, That this House hereby supports the annual celebration of Juneteenth

1 National Freedom Day in order to provide an opportunity for the people of the State to learn more
2 about our country's past and to better understand the experiences that have shaped our nation; and
3 be it further

4 RESOLVED, That the Secretary of State be and hereby is authorized and directed to
5 transmit duly certified copies of this resolution to the Governor of the State of Rhode Island and
6 Reverend Ronald V. Myers, Sr., M.D.

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