

Legislative Analysis



JUNETEENTH

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House Bill 4457 as introduced
Sponsor: Rep. Helena Scott
Committee: Government Operations [Discharged]
Complete to 6-14-23

Analysis available at
<http://www.legislature.mi.gov>

SUMMARY:

House Bill 4457 would create a new act to designate June 19 of each year as Juneteenth, in honor of the great moment in United States history when news of the Emancipation Proclamation, which declared that all slaves in Confederate-controlled areas were free, reached the state of Texas.

In making this designation, the legislature would recognize that slavery existed in American history for more than 200 years, and that millions of Africans were brought to the Americas as captives and slaves, transported crammed and stacked into the bottom holds of ships in a 5- to 12-week journey across the Atlantic known as the “Middle Passage.” About 11.5 million African-Americans survived the voyage across the ocean—but the number of those who died was probably higher. Once in the United States, the slaves were subjected to whipping, castration, branding, and rape.

The legislature would further observe that President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863, and that spontaneous celebrations erupted throughout the United States over the following months as African-Americans learned of their freedom. However, news of the Emancipation Proclamation reached different states and regions at different times, and it was not until June 19, 1865, that the message of freedom reached the state of Texas.

The legislature would encourage every individual in Michigan to pause on Juneteenth and reflect on the strong survival instinct of African-American slaves and the excitement and great joy with which African-Americans first celebrated the emancipation from slavery.

The day would serve as a reminder to all Americans of the status and importance of Americans of African descent as American citizens.

BACKGROUND:

Juneteenth is an annual holiday that celebrates the end of slavery in the United States. In a broader sense, it celebrates freedom and encourages reflection on our freedoms and the need to protect them. Juneteenth is also known as Emancipation Day, Freedom Day, Jubilee Day, Juneteenth Independence Day, Black Independence Day, and Juneteenth Celebration Day, and informally as America’s second Independence Day. Annette Gordon-Reed summarizes the origin of the holiday as follows:

June 19, 1865, shortened to “Juneteenth,” was the day that enslaved African Americans in Texas were told that slavery has ended, two years after the Emancipation

Proclamation had been signed, and just over two months after Confederate General Robert E. Lee had surrendered to Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox. Despite the formal surrender, the Confederate army had continued to fight on in Texas until mid-May. It was only after they finally surrendered that Major General Gordon Granger, while at his headquarters in Galveston, prepared General Order Number 3, announcing the end of legalized slavery in the state.¹

General Order Number 3, the announcement of the end of the Civil War and the end of slavery, read in part as follows:

The people of Texas are informed that, in accordance with a proclamation from the Executive of the United States, all slaves are free. This involves an absolute equality of personal rights and rights of property, between former masters and slaves and the connection heretofore existing between them, becomes that between employer and hired labor. The Freedmen are advised to remain at their present homes and work for wages. They are informed that they will not be allowed to collect at military posts; and they will not be supported in idleness either there or elsewhere.

According to the Congressional Research Service (CRS),² “Even after the general order, some enslavers withheld the information from enslaved people, holding them enslaved through one more harvest season” The CRS continues:

Texans celebrated Juneteenth beginning in 1866 with community-centric events, such as parades, cookouts, prayer gatherings, historical and cultural readings, and musical performances. Over time, communities have developed their own traditions. Some communities purchased land for Juneteenth celebrations, such as Emancipation Park in Houston, Texas. As families emigrated from Texas to other parts of the United States, they carried Juneteenth celebrations with them.

On January 1, 1980, Juneteenth officially became a Texas state holiday... Since then, the federal government, all 50 states, and the District of Columbia have also commemorated or recognized the day.

In 2021, legislation was passed and signed establishing Juneteenth National Independence Day as a federal holiday. In addition, according to the CRS, as of May 30, 2023, “At least 22 states along with the District of Columbia have designated Juneteenth as a permanent paid and/or legal holiday through legislation or executive action. Some states have made Juneteenth a paid holiday through a state statute that observes federal holidays or other days designated by the President as state holidays or by specifically directing the governor to make an annual proclamation.”³

In Michigan, Juneteenth has been a holiday for state employees, and a court holiday, since 2022.

¹ Annette Gordon-Reed, *On Juneteenth* (New York: Liveright, 2021), 11.

² <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/misc/R44865.pdf>

³ Those states are California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Georgia, Idaho, Illinois, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Oregon, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Virginia, and Washington.

FISCAL IMPACT:

The bill would have no fiscal impact on the state or local units of government.

POSITIONS:

The following entities indicated support for the bill (6-7-23):

- City of Ann Arbor
- Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan (BCBSM)
- Detroit Regional Chamber
- Michigan Catholic Conference
- Michigan Credit Union League

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■ This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan House Fiscal Agency staff for use by House members in their deliberations and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.