

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## SHB 1016

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As Reported by Senate Committee On:  
State Government & Elections, March 19, 2021

**Title:** An act relating to making Juneteenth a legal holiday.

**Brief Description:** Making Juneteenth a legal holiday.

**Sponsors:** House Committee on Appropriations (originally sponsored by Representatives Morgan, Lovick, Ryu, Wicks, Ortiz-Self, Berry, Leavitt, Johnson, J., Kloba, Shewmake, Simmons, Bateman, Lekanoff, Duerr, Fitzgibbon, Chopp, Slatter, Ramos, Ramel, Peterson, Gregerson, Valdez, Callan, Young, Hackney, Cody, Ormsby, Riccelli, Rude, Stonier, Fey, Frame, Santos, Macri, Taylor, Davis, Pollet, Bergquist and Harris-Talley).

**Brief History:** Passed House: 2/25/21, 89-9.

**Committee Activity:** State Government & Elections: 3/10/21, 3/19/21 [DP-WM, w/oRec].

### Brief Summary of Bill

- Designates June 19, recognized as Juneteenth, as a state legal holiday.

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## SENATE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT & ELECTIONS

**Majority Report:** Do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Hunt, Chair; Kuderer, Vice Chair; Wilson, J., Ranking Member; Hasegawa.

**Minority Report:** That it be referred without recommendation.

Signed by Senator Hawkins.

**Staff:** Melissa Van Gorkom (786-7491)

**Background:** State Holidays. Washington recognizes ten specific days as state legal holidays—New Year's Day, Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, President's Day, Memorial Day,

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Independence Day, Labor Day, Veterans' Day, Thanksgiving Day, Native American Heritage Day, and Christmas Day. In addition to legal holidays, the Legislature has statutorily recognized a number of days to commemorate an event, individual, or groups.

Juneteenth. On June 19, 1865, more than two years after the effective date of the Emancipation Proclamation, people in Galveston, Texas, finally learned that the Civil War had ended and enslaved people had been freed. June 19th has subsequently been celebrated as "Juneteenth" or Emancipation Day to commemorate the abolishment of slavery. In 2007, the Legislature designated Juneteenth as a day of remembrance for when slaves learned of their freedom. Forty-six other states and the District of Columbia also recognize Juneteenth as either a holiday or day of observance.

**Summary of Bill:** June 19, recognized as Juneteenth, is designated a state legal holiday.

**Appropriation:** The bill contains a null and void clause requiring specific funding be provided in an omnibus appropriation act.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

**Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members:** No.

**Effective Date:** Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony:** PRO: This makes Juneteenth a state paid holiday to commemorate the end of slavery, honor those who were held in captivity, and acknowledge the years of trauma. Though some ancestors were freed in 1863, the knowledge of freedom did not reach the last enslaved people until June 19, 1865. In all stages of my education, I have never had equal opportunity to learn of my true history in a form where blackness is celebrated for the involuntary contribution of my ancestors in American history as a whole, rather I have been taught false history that slavery ended after the Civil War. Continuing this false narrative undermines black and brown citizens in this country and the long lasting effects of Jim Crow laws after the Civil War. The black African American community has spent decades being told to wait, yet they are still in abject poverty with insurmountable barriers. Black folks are still fighting for the right to be seen and heard in the stories, history and contributions to America. This is a distinct step towards an antiracist future we claim to be pursuing as we cannot move forward without knowing and claiming our history and that is not possible without acknowledging it and working to dismantle the systems the institution of slavery has left behind.

Some say that it costs too much to acknowledge the end of slavery, but when will it be cheap enough to acknowledge that slavery was wrong and we should honor the memory of those who suffered under that yoke. Data shows that this country made over \$3 trillion on the backs of my ancestors so requesting a paid holiday is not close to the real cost of racial injustice, consider this to be a down payment. Some say the state of Washington did not

have slavery, but Washington benefited from the \$3 trillion, and the state of Washington was not a state on July 4, 1776, yet we celebrate that holiday each year. This bill would provide the opportunity to learn about the true independence day for the black community. Our family celebrates Juneteenth on the Fourth of July to try to teach the history but it is important to have this as a paid state holiday so we do not have to share holidays. It is an important day in United States history, the end of slavery in United State is a cause of celebration, remembrance and an opportunity to learn. This is a history we should all know and having it as a holiday will help. Over the past year the Governor has heard from many stakeholders who want to make Juneteenth a state legal holiday as a step in the right direction to recognizing the horrors and brutality of slavery and the persistent injustices that persist today while simultaneously celebrating the resilience and contributions that black Americans have made to this country. The Governor has committed to supporting this legislation and fully funded the proposal in his budget.

CON: There is no education provision as part of this bill, this does not teach history. We oppose the tokenization of our history and culture in a time when it is increasingly obvious that some people may be free but are far from liberated. We cannot and should not commemorate something that does not exist, it is erasure of our past and denial of our present. In the bigger picture this bill has been weaponized, Juneteenth as a state holiday is used as a shield upheld as a first step to addressing antiblack racism. This would cost Washington \$7.5 million which is not an investment in culture, workers, education, healthcare, housing, or other issues that impact the whole black life and prosperity for all Washingtonians. Money desperately needed to help save black communities during this global public health crisis, the impacts of which are disproportionate for our people, would be wasted if spent on this bill. We urge you to prioritize other bills that directly invest in people first.

OTHER: We do not have issue with the intent of celebrating Juneteenth. We appreciate and acknowledge the rich history the black community has experienced and the value and importance of Juneteenth but encourage you to focus on things like ending the use of force on our communities and vote yes on bills that allow for police officers to be audited and the working families tax credit that positively impact our community and move the needle on things that are substantive in nature. We prefer substance over symbolism and encourage you to promote and uplift those bills rather than a bill that is largely symbolic.

**Persons Testifying:** PRO: Representative Melanie Morgan, Prime Sponsor; Da'Mea Birdsong, Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges; MarcusAntonio Gunn, Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges; RaShelle Davis, Governor's Office; Paula Sardinas, Washington Build Back Black Alliance; Chalia Stallings-Ala'ilima, Association is Washington Assistant Attorneys General, Local 5297, WFSE/AFSCME; Sandra Toussaint, AFSCME Council 28/WFSE.

CON: Sakara Remmu, The Washington Black Lives Matter Alliance.

OTHER: Samuel Martin, Washington for Black Lives.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying:** No one.