

My name is Shawn Pratt. I am an active member of the Rutland Area NAACP. I am here today to testify on behalf of the Rutland Area NAACP and the Windham County NAACP branches for this bil S.206 to Officially Recognize Juneteenth as State Holiday thank you for having me . Presidents Mia Schultz from the Rutland Area Branch and Wichie Artu from the Windham County Branch are deeply apologetic that they are not able to be here today and they have assisted in the preparation of this testimony.

As a Black Vermonter and descendant of enslaved Americans, I passionately advocate for the recognition of Juneteenth as a state holiday in Vermont. Juneteenth is not just a celebration; it's a vital acknowledgment of our ancestors' struggles and resilience. For too long, our history has been marginalized and erased. Recognizing Juneteenth would affirm our existence, our contributions, and our ongoing fight for justice. Both branches of the NAACP in Vermont agree with this sentiment.

While Vermont made strides by partially abolishing slavery in 1777, we cannot overlook the fact that its institutions and white citizens still benefited from the exploitation and enslavement of Black people. The legacy of slavery extends far beyond its legal abolition; it permeates every aspect of society, from economic disparities to systemic racism. Even in a state known for its progressive values, the effects of slavery are still felt today. Recognizing Juneteenth as a state holiday is not just a symbolic gesture; it's a necessary acknowledgment of Vermont's complicity in the oppression of Black people and a commitment to rectifying past injustices. By confronting this uncomfortable truth, Vermont can begin to dismantle the systems of inequity that continue to perpetuate harm against its Black residents.

Vermont has a chance to stand on the right side of history by embracing Juneteenth. It's not just about a day off; it's about recognizing the horrors of slavery and the ongoing fight against systemic racism. By making Juneteenth a state holiday, Vermont can send a powerful message of solidarity with its Black residents and demonstrate a commitment to confronting our country's painful past.

Moreover, celebrating Juneteenth would provide an opportunity for education and reflection. It's a chance to learn about the legacy of slavery, the struggles of our ancestors, . The Vermont branches of the NAACP therefore urge this committee and the entire legislature to pass this bill. By recognizing Juneteenth, Vermont can take a meaningful step towards healing the wounds of the past and building a more just and equitable future for all its residents.