

**SHARON GARY-SMITH, NAACP PORTLAND 1120B TESTIMONY  
TO SENATE RULES COMMITTEE IN FAVOR OF HB 2168 –  
JUNETEENTH HOLIDAY  
Tuesday, April 27, 2021, 1pm**

Greetings Chair Wagner, Vice Chair Girod and members of the Senate Rules Committee. I am Sharon Gary-Smith, the president of the NAACP Portland 1120B branch.

I come today to testify in favor of making June 19th, Juneteenth, an officially recognized state holiday in Oregon.

I come as an Oregonian by birth, born and raised in Portland. My love for our state spans its broad mountain ranges, clear and clean air (most of the time), its stunning landscapes from the western Pacific to the desert east, and towering Douglas Firs, fine wine grapes and agricultural abundance.

I also come today as an Oregonian who knows the importance of historical memory as benchmarks and reminders of the struggle to make our state work harder to change its high and low history – of exclusion, marginalization, displacement, and internment, to one that displays a constant willingness to make change.

I come knowing the significance of remembrance and the recognition of what making Juneteenth an official Oregon state holiday can do to elevate the critical cultural history, sacrifices, and victories for African American/Black Oregonians, as this opportunity before you represents today.

Juneteenth reflects remembrance of the journey to a freedom not originally intended for Black Americans; folks like me. It is rightfully called Freedom Day, Jubilee Day, Liberation Day, and Emancipation Day, at once a celebration of our emancipation from ‘official’ enslavement in the United States.

It is the necessary commemoration of the June 19, 1865 announcement by Union Army General Gordon Granger who arrived in Galveston, Texas to proclaim freedom from slavery, **except it was 2-1/2 years after the Proclamation had been signed into effect by President Lincoln.**

**What Juneteenth offers as a state holiday** is an opportunity for all to learn from and to celebrate achievements against the odds. It is true history that informs and elevates the sacrifices made on the journey to freedom.

**What an official Juneteenth holiday in Oregon can remind us, as history often does**, is that we can do more than merely wish unpleasant moments in our history would just go away, that we can acknowledge the difficult and hateful parts of our country and states past **to recognize that history cannot be silenced, but it can be a critical informer of our paths forward to real freedom, justice, and liberation for all in Oregon and across our country.**

And, as importantly, I come today representing the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, bringing the hope and expectations of a renowned civil rights organization, 109 years old locally and 114 years old nationally, that has elevated the fight for equal opportunity for ‘colored people” and justice for all.

We ask that you make the decision to honor our history and build new history in Oregon by moving forward Governor Kate Brown’s commitment to establish June 19<sup>th</sup> in our state as an official paid holiday; one that allows us all to learn, lead and celebrate African American’s victory over official slavery in these United States. Let us right that historical wrong with a “right” vote now.

Thank you.