



Senate Committee on Rules

Testimony in Support of HB 2168

Andrea Meyer, Director of Government Relations

April 27, 2021

AARP Oregon is pleased to support HB 2168 that establishes Juneteenth as a legal state holiday. AARP is the nation's largest nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to empowering Americans 50 and older to choose how they live as they age. With 503,000 members in Oregon, AARP works to strengthen communities and advocate for what matters most to families, with a focus on health security, financial stability and personal fulfillment.

Since 1980, when Texas became the first state to designate Juneteenth as a holiday, 45 other states and the District of Columbia have moved officially to recognize the day. HB 2168 would add Oregon to that list.

June 19th (or Juneteenth), commemorates the end of slavery in the United States. Juneteenth has been celebrated by African-Americans since June 19, 1865, when Union soldiers arrived in Texas and read the Emancipation Proclamation announcing that enslaved African Americans, who should have been freed under the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863, were free. In 1859, just six years prior, when Oregon became a state it was the only state admitted to the Union with an Exclusion Law in its constitution. This law remained in effect until voters removed it in 1926, while the original discriminatory language stayed on the books until 2002.

In 2021, following the nationwide protests over social justice here in Oregon and across the country, there is renewed and more widespread interest in doing the hard work to listen, understand our history, and move forward to address the systemic inequities in our society. Juneteenth symbolizes this effort and ideal. It is a beacon of hope for all those yearning for liberty in a more equitable, inclusive, and just place to live, study, work and retire.

As Maya Angelou observed "hate has caused a lot of problems in the world, but it has not solved one yet." AARP Oregon urges passage of HB 2168.