

Letter of support for: SB 8598/AB10628

Dear Governor Cuomo,

The Coalition of Library Workers of Color, a Ramapo Catskill Library System group committed to eliciting change and growth in support of people of color within the library community, and Ramapo Catskill Library System strongly support S.B. 8598/AB10628.

Juneteenth is the oldest known celebration of the end of slavery. The time is now to recognize the day as a state holiday as the country faces a racial reckoning in the aftermath of the May 25, 2020 killing of George Floyd and massive Black Lives Matter protests and demonstrations. By signing S.B. 8598/AB10628 into law, this act would be a genuine recognition of the need to guarantee freedom and equality for all that live in New York State and beyond. New York State recognized Juneteenth as a day of commemoration in 2004 with N.Y. Exec. Law §168-a(3). Now is the time to go a step further and make it a state holiday as Massachusetts Governor Charlie Baker did in July of this year.

On January 1, 1863, enslaved people anxiously awaited news of the Emancipation Proclamation, which at midnight would free all those enslaved in the Southern States. True freedom would not come for all until the Thirteenth Amendment, but this first step provided hope to those trapped in the Confederacy. Unfortunately, not everyone would immediately be free as it could not be implemented in areas still under Confederate control. That is until June 19, 1865, when 250,000 enslaved black people in the last Confederate stronghold in Galveston Bay, Texas, were freed by executive order.

The Library Code of Ethics includes in its statements that it is the library's duty to advocate for equitable service policies, protections of all employees' rights and welfare, and strive for excellence in maintaining and fostering the aspirations of all its current and potential members. For this reason, we stand in solidarity as we support your efforts in making Juneteenth a national holiday. We believe it is the mandate of libraries in our system, and beyond to grow community access to precisely what was denied in those years. As such, it is more than fitting that we celebrate Juneteenth when freedom finally settled on those who have too long been denied.

The Coalition of Library Workers of Color and Ramapo Catskill Library Systems urges the state of New York to recognize that for black communities in America, justice is often delayed. For those two years after Lincoln's Proclamation, freedom, truth, and information were actively withheld from Black Americans deep in confederate Texas.

Many Black Americans have celebrated Juneteenth or "Freedom Day" in the years since 1865, we urge that you honor its legacy and significance as a second independence day by making Juneteenth a state holiday.

Sincerely,

RCLS Coalition of Library Workers of Color and Ramapo Catskill Library System



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Library
System**

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