

Chairman Veda, members of the Senate Government and Veteran Affairs Committee, my name is Barry Nelson, I am an organizer with the North Dakota Human Rights Coalition. I am here in support of SB2232 and urge that this committee sends this bill with a strong do pass.

North Dakota Human Rights Coalition is a statewide, membership based organization that promotes fairness, equity and the protection of human rights for all its residents.

It is consistent with that mission and purpose that we would stand in support of the establishment of Juneteenth as a state recognized holiday. A quick perusal of the internet would find that Juneteenth – a blending of the words June and nineteenth – is the oldest known US celebration of the end of slavery. It commemorates June 19, 1865. That's the day that Union Maj. Gordon Granger rode into Galveston, Texas, and told slaves of their emancipation from slavery.

African-Americans and others mark Juneteenth – also called Emancipation Day – much like the Fourth of July, with parties, picnics and gatherings with family and friends.

Forty-six states and the District of Columbia have designated Juneteenth as an observance with only one state establishing it as a holiday with paid time off.

We already have many observances of holidays from the whimsical to the more serious. We celebrate St. Patrick's day with parades and festivals, Syttende de Mai with music and food, Cinco de Mayo and many others. It seems right and fitting to commemorate what is considered to be a very popular and significant day in the life of this country. Whether we have African American heritage or not, it is a time to honor this milestone in our country's history, to learn about the significant role that African Americans continue to play in our country and our state. In fact, this past summer, many communities throughout the state did hold festivities.

It is time that North Dakota joins the ranks of most of the rest of the country to celebrate Juneteenth as an official holiday.

Please give SB2232 a do pass.

I stand for questions.