



June 17, 2020

## Juneteenth and True Emancipation

I urge Governor J.B. Pritzker to lower the state's flags to half-staff on Juneteenth and pause for a moment of silence in recognition of the lives lost because of hate and racism.

Juneteenth is the oldest nationally celebrated commemoration of the ending of slavery in the United States. Dating back to 1865, it was on June 19<sup>th</sup> that the Union soldiers, led by Major General Gordon Granger, landed at Galveston, Texas with news that the war had ended and that the enslaved were now free. (source: juneteenth.com)

Illinois should lead the nation in condemning hate and racism. Lowering flags to half-staff across the state and pausing for a moment of reflection on Juneteenth would serve as a time of reflection and as a time for more action to deliver justice for those who have faced racism throughout their lives. Too many lives have been lost to hate and brutality, and these lives must not be forgotten.

As Richard Rohr recently stated, "For the kinds of freedom and liberation that are needed today, we need to use the word "emancipation", which directs our attention to a systemic level of freedom." Juneteenth celebrates the Emancipation Proclamation which actually happened two years earlier, but those in Texas hadn't heard about it yet due to their oppression. What we need in our country right now is a TRUE emancipation, an emancipation that Rohr says begins when each of us have "achieved the inner freedom to love" as we work to change systems that oppress people, especially Black people.

Lowering flags on Juneteenth, June 19, would send a message of unity in Illinois amid the unrest after the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis, which has created this moment in time when the whole world has stood up against racism and hate. This action would be a step toward addressing the inequities and injustices against the Black community. We have to recognize that there's a problem, and we want the governor to be on record saying, 'Look, I'm all-in to make sure that there's justice for ALL in Illinois'.

I have also asked Gov. Pritzker to act, by executive order, to create an office of equity and inclusion in Illinois, promoting racial and social justice. It's very difficult right now for the General Assembly to do anything because we are not in session until November, so I believe the governor must be bold in his efforts and deliberate about his will to deal with the problems in the black community.

Let's pledge this Juneteenth 2020, in the Land of Lincoln, to take action as a state to fight racism in all its forms.

Sincerely,

La Shawn K. Ford  
State Representative-Eighth District