

For Immediate Release

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### **Juneteenth- A Message from Mayor Rhodes-Conway**

Today is Juneteenth. On this day in 1865, the people of Galveston Texas were told the war had ended and that enslaved people were now free. This news came to Texas 2 ½ years after President Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation.

Juneteenth commemorates the end of over 400 years of enslavement of African American people in the United States. It recognizes that many people in Texas were still enslaved after the Emancipation Proclamation was signed, and that knowledge of the Proclamation was deliberately kept from them, and they continued to endure cruel, inhumane treatment, and exploitation at the hands of White people.

The fact that Juneteenth became a date to celebrate highlights the resiliency and solidarity of African Americans. If one person was not free, no one was free. Juneteenth is a celebration of African Americans' freedom, and achievements. As a White person, I am humbled by the strength of African American people in this country.

Juneteenth shines a light on the horrendous act of slavery and our history as Americans. It is difficult to look at, but we must. We cannot address systemic, institutional racism without accepting and acknowledging the horrors of the past that continue to harm African Americans today. That is the only way we can have a better future.

We as a country have taken some steps towards change, but we can all see that there is much more work to be done. I look forward to working with the African American community to do this hard work and make Madison the city we all want it to be.

Below is the text of a Proclamation, which I have signed, joining City of Madison Common Council leadership, to recognize the importance of Juneteenth.

### **Proclamation Recognizing Juneteenth**

WHEREAS, it has been over 400 years since the first Africans were enslaved and violently brought to what would become the United States, including to Florida in 1526 and to Point Comfort, Virginia, in 1619; and

WHEREAS, it was not until June 19th, 1865, that federal troops arrived in Galveston, Texas, finally emancipating enslaved Texans; and

WHEREAS, news of the end of slavery travelled slowly to enslaved laborers throughout Texas, with some plantation owners keeping the news from them until after the harvest of that year; and

WHEREAS, June 19th is known as Juneteenth in acknowledgement of that fact, and to commemorate this date as the end of slavery in the United States; and

WHEREAS, although slavery was formally abolished in December of 1865 with the enactment of the 13th amendment to the US constitution, it contains an exception for the labor of incarcerated individuals, which has incited a rash of practices, policies and laws targeting and disproportionately disenfranchising Black people in America through criminalization, exploitation of their labor, mass incarceration and voter suppression; and

WHEREAS, in 1866, emancipated men and women in Texas began celebrating Juneteenth as Jubilee Day; and

WHEREAS, 47 states, including Wisconsin, have declared Juneteenth to be a state holiday; and

WHEREAS, Juneteenth reminds all of us of the continued resilience of people of African descent in America; and

WHEREAS, protests against systemic racism and its brutal consequences for Black people have swept through all 50 states and across the globe, which demonstrate that persistent inequalities continue to exist, particularly in mass incarceration, income disparities and home and business ownership; and

WHEREAS, according to Wallethub's recent study of 50 states, Wisconsin ranks as the state with the worst economic racial inequality across eight major metrics, including median income, unemployment rate, homeownership rate, and poverty; and

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the City of Madison calls upon *all* Madisonians to take up the charge to promote racial equity and social justice, particularly in the City of Madison, in order to bring true meaning to the significance of this day as we embark on ways to eradicate systemic racism through police reforms, and addressing health and economic inequities.

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that the Madison Mayor and Common Council Leadership proclaim June 19<sup>th</sup>, 2020, in commemoration of

**Juneteenth**