



Metropolitan Water Reclamation District *of* Greater Chicago

# Press Release

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## MWRD Board of Commissioners recognize Juneteenth as holiday option for employees

The Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD) Board of Commissioners unanimously made a trailblazing decision to approve plans that will allow employees to recognize Juneteenth as a holiday for the first time.

In recognition of the importance of Juneteenth as the oldest known celebration of emancipation of slaves in the United States, MWRD officials sought a way to more fully recognize the day. Although Juneteenth is observed each year on June 19, the occasion is officially celebrated in Illinois on the third Saturday in June annually. With this change, the MWRD gives employees the choice to use June 19 as their one additional holiday selection each year. In addition to Juneteenth, the additional holiday choices for MWRD employees include the days preceding or following Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day or New Year's Day.

"The day symbolizes freedom, achievement, and racial equality not only for the descendants of former slaves, but for all Americans, and we feel that it should be recognized in that light," said MWRD Vice President Barbara McGowan.

On July 16, the commissioners passed a resolution honoring Juneteenth, and on June 19 of this year, the MWRD joined the state of Illinois in lowering its flags to celebrate Juneteenth. The date marked the 155th anniversary of the ending of slavery in the United States.

It was on this day in 1865 when Major General Gordon Granger and his Union soldiers marched into Galveston, Texas with the news that the war had ended and proclaimed "absolute equality of rights" to liberate the country's last remaining slaves.

Juneteenth is recognized as a state holiday in 47 states. There is legislation in Illinois sponsored by state Rep. Thaddeus Jones (29th District) that will observe Juneteenth National Freedom Day on June 19. Although it was still 2.5 years after President Abraham Lincoln's famous Emancipation Proclamation, Juneteenth gives Americans opportunity to reflect on the nation's history, the struggle for civil rights and continued work for equality.

"The MWRD is the first government agency to recognize this holiday and at no additional cost to taxpayers," said MWRD President Kari K. Steele. "We are proud to afford this holiday to our staff to allow them to reflect, celebrate and remember our past."

"The day symbolizes freedom, achievement, and racial equality not only for the descendants of former slaves, but for all Americans, and we feel that it should be recognized in that light especially since our fight for equity continues on today," said MWRD Commissioner Kimberly Du Buclet. "It is deserving of recognition just as a day off around Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's Day holidays."