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Black Caucus of the National Task Force on Sexual and Domestic Violence Statement on Juneteenth National Independence Day

WASHINGTON, DC - Common understandings of United States history teach us that slavery ended in January 1863 with President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation. Yet in a sparsely populated country ravaged by Civil War – and with the Confederacy violently intent on keeping Black people enslaved as long as they could – it took several more years for freedom to actually reach the thousands of enslaved Black people across the American South.

Even with the surrender of the Confederate Armies at Appomattox Courthouse two months earlier, it wasn't until **June 19, 1865**, that Union Army soldiers arrived in Galveston, Texas, the most remote slave holding state, to finally declare all enslaved people free. The anniversary of June 19th is known as **Juneteenth** – a day that commemorates and celebrates the end of legal slavery in the United States, and has now been declared an official federal holiday by President Joseph R. Biden Jr., Vice President Kamala D. Harris, and the United States Congress.

The **National Task Force to End Sexual and Domestic Violence (NTF)**, led by its **Black Caucus** representing Black-serving organizations and Black leadership in the movement to end gender-based violence, is proud to celebrate Juneteenth together. Many of our respective organizations have already declared Juneteenth an official holiday, and we are proud to celebrate its federal designation and encourage gender-based violence advocacy groups across the nation to join in this joyous commemoration.

The *true* end of legalized slavery in the United States also represents the end of legalized sexual violence and physical abuse against black people and their families, and though we still have a ways to go to undo its devastating legacy, the declaration of Juneteenth as an official federal holiday marks important progress worth celebrating. While acknowledging the significance of Juneteenth, we must remain in vigilant pursuit of a society that truly advances black dignity – through the protection of voting rights, equal treatment under the law, fair access to opportunity, and the end of all forms of violence against Black people. As Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was fond of reminding us, “*the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice.*”

We would like to thank Congress and the White House for their swift action declaring **Juneteenth National Independence Day**. The NTF is proud to advance the work of our Black members, and to continue standing in solidarity on the long collective march to freedom.