

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE**  
**SENATE STATE AFFAIRS STANDING COMMITTEE**

February 14, 2023

3:31 p.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Senator Scott Kawasaki, Chair  
Senator Matt Claman, Vice Chair  
Senator Jesse Bjorkman  
Senator Bill Wielechowski  
Senator Kelly Merrick

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

All members present

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

SENATE BILL NO. 26

"An Act relating to special registration plates commemorating peace officers killed in the line of duty."

- MOVED CSSB 26(STA) OUT OF COMMITTEE

SENATE BILL NO. 22

"An Act establishing Juneteenth Day as a legal holiday."

- HEARD & HELD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

BILL: SB 26

SHORT TITLE: LICENSE PLATES: FALLEN PEACE OFFICERS

SPONSOR(s): SENATOR(s) KAUFMAN

01/18/23	(S)	PREFILE RELEASED 1/9/23
01/18/23	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/18/23	(S)	STA, FIN
01/31/23	(S)	STA AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)
01/31/23	(S)	Heard & Held
01/31/23	(S)	MINUTE(STA)
02/14/23	(S)	STA AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

BILL: SB 22

SHORT TITLE: PROCLAIM JUNETEENTH DAY A HOLIDAY

SPONSOR(s) : SENATOR(s) GRAY-JACKSON

01/18/23 (S) PREFILE RELEASED 1/9/23  
01/18/23 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS  
01/18/23 (S) STA  
02/14/23 (S) STA AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

**WITNESS REGISTER**

JOE HAYES, Staff  
Senator Scott Kawasaki  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Reviewed the explanation of changes between version A and version B of SB 26.

ELVI GRAY-JACKSON, District G  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Sponsor of SB 22.

BESSE ODOM, Staff  
Senator Gray-Jackson  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented the sectional analysis for SB 22 on behalf of the sponsor.

CELESTE HODGE GROWDEN, President and CEO  
Alaska Black Caucus  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of SB 22.

EDWARD WESLEY, representing self  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of SB 22.

VIKKI JO KENNEDY, representing self  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of SB 22.

**ACTION NARRATIVE**

3:31:53 PM

**CHAIR SCOTT KAWASAKI** called the Senate State Affairs Standing Committee meeting to order at 3:31 p.m. Present at the call to

order were Senators Bjorkman, Wielechowski, Claman, Merrick, and Chair Kawasaki.

**SB 26-LICENSE PLATES: FALLEN PEACE OFFICERS**

[3:33:16 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 26 "An Act relating to special registration plates commemorating peace officers killed in the line of duty."

[3:33:32 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI solicited a motion to adopt the proposed committee substitute (CS) for SB 26.

[3:33:37 PM](#)

SENATOR CLAMAN moved to adopt the committee substitute (CS) for SB 26, work order 33-LS0238\B, as the working document.

[3:33:52 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI objected for purposes of discussion.

[3:34:03 PM](#)

At ease

[3:34:34 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI reconvened the meeting and asked Joe Hayes to provide the explanation of changes from version A to version B of SB 26.

[3:34:46 PM](#)

JOE HAYES, Staff, Senator Scott Kawasaki, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, reviewed the following changes from version A to version B of SB 26:

**Page 2 Line 1**

Adds "(3) a correctional officer" to the bill's definition of "peace officer."

**Page 2 Lines 2 - 3**

Renumbers two sections accordingly.

[3:35:22 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI removed his objection and invited the sponsor to provide a short summary of the bill.

[3:35:50 PM](#)

JAMES KAUFMAN, District F, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, sponsor of SB 26, stated that the bill seeks to create a commemorative license plate for peace officers killed in the line of duty.

[3:37:07 PM](#)

SENATOR MERRICK stated that she would bring up her continuing concerns about the fiscal note in the Finance Committee.

[3:37:30 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI opened public testimony on SB 26; finding none, he closed public testimony and solicited a motion.

[3:37:56 PM](#)

SENATOR CLAMAN moved to report CSSB 26, work order 33-LS0238\B, from committee with individual recommendations and attached fiscal note(s).

[3:38:17 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI found no objection and CSSB 26(STA) was reported from the Senate State Affairs Standing Committee.

[3:38:26 PM](#)

At ease

**SB 22-PROCLAIM JUNETEENTH DAY A HOLIDAY**

[3:38:35 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI reconvened the meeting and announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 22 "An Act establishing Juneteenth Day as a legal holiday."

[3:40:39 PM](#)

ELVI GRAY-JACKSON, District G, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, sponsor of SB 22, stated that this legislation will elevate Juneteenth to the level of other legal holidays. The hope is that this will create a better environment for a more thorough understanding of the history of African Americans in Alaska and the US.

She said thoughts about America elicit feelings of freedom and justice, but studying Juneteenth will make it clear that these ideas have not been equally applied. After President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, it took nearly three years for many enslaved African Americans to realize this new freedom.

SENATOR GRAY-JACKSON continued to present SB 22 paraphrasing the sponsor statement that read as follows:

In 1865, union soldiers landed at Galveston, TX with news that the war had ended. This news meant that enslaved people were now free. Since 1865, people across the world have joined together to celebrate an important day. Juneteenth- also known as Freedom Day or Emancipation Day- is a holiday celebrating the emancipation of previously enslaved peoples in America. Each year on June 19th, people of all races join one another in fellowship to honor those who gave so much for America and educate themselves about the struggles toward liberation for Black Americans. Juneteenth has been recognized and celebrated throughout Alaska. There have been events ranging from parades to street fairs.

Senate Bill 22 would make Juneteenth an observed legal state holiday alongside July 4th and Memorial Day. This bill would make Juneteenth a paid state holiday.

SENATOR GRAY-JACKSON shared that June 19 was the anniversary of her arrival in Anchorage 40 years ago.

[3:43:24 PM](#)

SENATOR MERRICK asked where it was outlined in the bill that Juneteenth would be a paid state holiday.

SENATOR GRAY-JACKSON replied the bill adds this holiday in the same section of statute that designates other holidays. She directed attention to paragraph (6) on page 1, line [11] and conveyed that Legislative Legal said the bill correctly makes Juneteenth a paid state holiday.

CHAIR KAWASAKI noted the individuals who were available to opine on the question.

SENATOR MERRICK said she was comfortable with the answer.

CHAIR KAWASAKI asked Ms. Odom to walk through the sectional analysis.

[3:45:13 PM](#)

BESSE ODOM, Staff, Senator Gray-Jackson, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, presented the sectional analysis for SB 22 on behalf of the sponsor. It read as follows:

**Section 1.** This section amends AS 44.12.010(a), the Statute regarding legal holidays. Specifically, it requires that June 19th, known as Juneteenth Day, be considered a legal holiday.

**Section 2.** This section amends AS 44.12.020, the statute regarding holidays that fall on a Sunday, with conforming language that reflects section 1 of this bill.

**Section 3.** This section repeals AS 44.12.090

[3:46:12 PM](#)

SENATOR BJORKMAN asked whether the holiday would apply to local municipalities.

SENATOR GRAY-JACKSON replied it's already a paid holiday for federal employees and were the bill to pass, it would be a paid holiday for state employees.

SENATOR BJORKMAN said some federal holidays must be paid and he wondered whether this would be the same for political subunits of the state.

SENATOR GRAY-JACKSON restated that SB 22 would make Juneteenth a paid state holiday.

[3:47:35 PM](#)

At ease

[3:48:04 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI reconvened the meeting and asked Ms. Odom to proceed with the PowerPoint.

[3:48:20 PM](#)

MS. ODOM presented a PowerPoint to further explain SB 22. She paraphrased the following:

**WHAT IS JUNETEENTH**

- Also known as Freedom Day, Jubilee Day, Emancipation Day or Liberation Day. The word 'Juneteenth' resulted from the words 'June Nineteenth' being combined together in speech.
- Juneteenth is a holiday that celebrates the end of slavery in the United States. On June 19, 1865, Union

soldiers arrived to take control of Texas and enforce the emancipation of slaves in the state. In Galveston, Texas, the newly freed slaves held large public celebrations and so laid the base for future Juneteenth activities.

- Juneteenth became a federal holiday last year. It is now one of 11 official federal holidays - or 12 for federal workers in the District of Columbia and surrounding areas during presidential inauguration years - meaning that federal workers get a paid day off and there's no mail delivery.

#### **FOLLOWING THE TREND**

- Texas was the first state to pass legislation that would require that Juneteenth be observed as a state holiday in 1980. Followed by:
  - Florida (1991)
  - Oklahoma (1994)
  - Minnesota (1996)
  - Delaware (2000)
  - Idaho (2001)
- Various companies observe the holiday:
  - Tesla
  - Nike
  - Target
  - NFL
  - Lyft
- Juneteenth celebrations are also held in other countries around the world, including South Korea, Israel, France, Guam, Honduras, Japan, Taiwan, and Trinidad and Tobago.

#### **WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR JUNETEENTH TO BECOME A STATE HOLIDAY**

- In some states, people employed by the state may have a day off work. Stores, post offices, and other organizations and businesses are likely to be open as usual, but some may be closed or have restricted opening hours in some areas. Many public transit services operate on their usual schedule, but there may be some changes.

[3:51:03 PM](#)

SENATOR MERRICK noted that the PowerPoint says that Juneteenth would be a federal holiday and no mail would be delivered, then on the last slide it says post offices are likely to be open as usual.

SENATOR GRAY-JACKSON replied it's a federal holiday and mail is not delivered.

[3:51:49 PM](#)

SENATOR CLAMAN said he always found it interesting that the Union soldiers went to Galveston because it is a small town but at the time it was the major port city for the Gulf Coast. Houston didn't exist. He opined that it was well worth the journey to visit Galveston for anybody who's in that part of Texas.

[3:52:45 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI thanked him for the geographic history of Texas.

CHAIR KAWASAKI opened public testimony on SB 22.

[3:53:03 PM](#)

CELESTE HODGE GROWDEN, President and CEO, Alaska Black Caucus, Anchorage, Alaska, thanked the sponsor for bringing the bill forward. She stated that the Alaska Black Caucus is a nonprofit formed in the '70s to champion the lives of Black people and other people of color in the areas of health, economics, education, and justice. She voiced support for SB 22 to establish Juneteenth as a state holiday in Alaska. It commemorates the emancipation of African American slaves following the end of the American Civil War in 1865. In years after that, Juneteenth celebrations of Black culture spread from Texas across the South. Texas again led the way in 1938 with cultural festivals and a formal proclamation of Juneteenth. Texas passed legislation to that effect in 1979. Both former President Trump and President Biden supported making Juneteenth a federal holiday and President Biden signed the bill into law on June 19, 2021. This federal holiday is recognized in all 50 states and the District of Columbia and 21 states recognize it as a paid state holiday. The Alaska Black Caucus urges Alaska to join these states by passing SB 22. It will push the needle toward equity.

[3:59:01 PM](#)

EDWARD WESLEY, representing self, Anchorage, Alaska, stated that he was a former president of the Anchorage branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

(NAACP), and he was speaking in support of SB 22. He stated that at the 1936 summer Olympics in Berlin Hitler sought to demonstrate the greatness of his nation with a team of superior athletes. However, Ralph Metcalf and Jessie Owens, both African Americans, stepped forward and lifted this nation. Jesse Owens won four gold medals.

SB 22 acknowledges the sacrifices of African Americans. Two hundred years of free labor denied their ancestors generational wealth. African Americans nevertheless made major contributions to this nation that all citizens enjoy every day. George Washington Carver's work in the area of agriculture is one such example. Despite contributing to more than 80 percent of the field work done in agriculture, African Americans were not allowed to participate when Social Security was established. African Americans helped build the ALCAN Highway, have been a major population in the military, calculated the trajectory to the moon by hand, and made major contributions in sports and entertainment.

MR. WESLEY opined that support for SB 22 acknowledges the past and embraces a bright future of unlimited possibility. An added benefit is that it will bring more tourists to this state and stimulate economic activity.

[4:02:59 PM](#)

VIKKI JO KENNEDY, representing self, Juneau, Alaska, stated that she supports SB 22 but doesn't think public transportation should be closed, because it is already closed on enough holidays. She pointed out that in Alaska, it is primarily people of color who use public transportation.

[4:04:42 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI stated that he would hold public testimony open until the bill is heard a second time.

SENATOR GRAY-JACKSON corrected the record, stating that Congress made Juneteenth a federal holiday with a bill. It wasn't through executive order as she stated earlier.

[4:05:59 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI held SB 26 in committee.

[4:06:37 PM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Kawasaki adjourned the Senate State Affairs Standing Committee meeting at 4:06 p.m.