



Tompkins County Legislature

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PROCLAMATION

WHEREAS, slavery was brought to North America in 1619 with the arrival of the first enslaved Africans to a colony in Virginia, marking the beginning of centuries of systemic oppression and dehumanization, and although President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation effective January 1, 1863, it was not until June 19, 1865—more than two years later—that enslaved African Americans in Galveston, Texas, were informed of their freedom, a date now commemorated as Juneteenth, and

WHEREAS, Juneteenth stands as a powerful symbol of African American perseverance, representing the struggles, sacrifices, and unyielding spirit of those who resisted bondage, survived the horrors of slavery, and fought for liberation, dignity, and full citizenship, and

WHEREAS, Tompkins County is home to a rich legacy of African American history and resistance, including the enlistment of 26 African American men who joined the Union Army between December 1863 and February 1864 at St. James AME Zion Church, the oldest standing church in Ithaca and among the nation's first African Methodist Episcopal Zion congregations—a site that continues to represent faith, activism, and community, and

WHEREAS, the legacy of African American activism is deeply woven into the Civil Rights Movement of the 20th century and continues today through local leaders, educators, and advocates in Tompkins County who challenge racial injustice and push for transformative change in housing, healthcare, policing, education, and access to opportunity, and

WHEREAS, African Americans have enriched the fields of science, medicine, literature, music, arts, and public service; prominent figures include Dr. Dorothy Cotton, civil rights leader and longtime Ithaca resident, whose work with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference helped elevate the voices of Black Americans across the nation, and contemporary leaders in Tompkins County who continue to guide public institutions, civic initiatives, and grassroots organizations, and

WHEREAS, Juneteenth is not only a commemoration of emancipation but a celebration of African American excellence—evident in the thriving Black-owned businesses in Tompkins County, the contributions of Black educators and students in local schools and colleges, and the cultural richness shared through art, food, scholarship, and public service, and

WHEREAS, the continued observance of Juneteenth reminds us that the path to equity and justice remains unfinished. African Americans still face disparities in income, housing access, healthcare outcomes, and representation in leadership. By naming and addressing these disparities, we reaffirm our county's commitment to racial justice and the promise of liberty for all, and

WHEREAS, the Southside Community Center continues its longstanding tradition of honoring Juneteenth through its annual Festival block party, fostering intergenerational learning, cultural celebration, and community unity, and

RESOLVED, That the Tompkins County Legislature does hereby proclaim, recognize, and designate June 19, 2025, as

JUNETEENTH

in Tompkins County and honors the enduring strength, culture, and contributions of African Americans who have fought for freedom, justice, and equality in our county and beyond.

RESOLVED, further, That the Tompkins County Legislature encourages all residents to reflect on the legacy of slavery and racial injustice, to celebrate the achievements and culture of African Americans, and to actively engage in building a community rooted in equity, dignity, and mutual respect.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I, Dan Klein, on behalf of the Tompkins County Legislature, have hereunto set my hand and caused to be affixed the great seal of Tompkins County, State of New York, on this 17th day of June 2025.

Dan Klein, Chair
Tompkins County Legislature