



e-Alert

08.20.20

Governor Declares Juneteenth a Massachusetts State Holiday

Background

June 19, commonly referred to as Juneteenth, commemorates the date of the official end of legal slavery in the United States, June 19, 1865. Though Abraham Lincoln had declared the end of slavery in the Emancipation Proclamation over two years earlier, Juneteenth marks the date when the law was enforced in Texas, the last remaining slave state.

The celebration of Juneteenth, also referred to as Freedom Day, Jubilee Day, and Emancipation Day, has a long history throughout the US. Currently, 47 states and the District of Columbia observe it in some form, though only a few treat it as a paid state holiday. Most recently, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts has established Juneteenth as a paid state holiday going forward.

Summary

On June 19, 2020, Governor Charlie Baker declared Juneteenth a Massachusetts state holiday in an official [proclamation](#). In his proclamation, the governor stated that “Juneteenth is an

This content is provided with the understanding that HR Knowledge is not rendering legal advice. While every effort is made to provide current information, the law changes regularly and laws may vary depending on the state or municipality. The material is made available for informational purposes only and is not a substitute for legal advice or your professional judgment. You should review applicable laws in your jurisdiction and consult experienced counsel for legal advice. If you have any questions regarding this content, please contact [HR Knowledge](#).

opportunity to recommit ourselves to the goal of creating a more equal and just society, an effort that continues today.”

Following this proclamation, on July 24, the governor signed a bill formally designating Juneteenth Independence Day as an annual state holiday. This designation adds Juneteenth to a list of “partially restricted” holidays that are covered by the Blue Laws, Massachusetts laws that establish a general rule that most employers may not be open for business on Sundays and certain holidays.

This designation creates new obligations for many retail employers (those with more than seven employees), which are exempted from the Blue Laws as long as they provide their employees with premium pay for working on the holiday and do not force their employees to work on that day. Currently, that premium rate of pay is 1.3 times an employee's regular rate. The holiday premium pay requirements for partially restricted holidays will be phased out between now and 2023. On January 1, 2021, premium pay for these holidays will drop to 1.2 times the normal hourly rate. On January 1, 2022, it will drop to 1.1 times the normal hourly rate. Finally, after January 1, 2023, premium pay for partially restricted holidays will be eliminated altogether. However, restrictions on requiring employees to work on these holidays will remain in effect.

Employer Next Steps

- Massachusetts employers should update their list of 2021 paid holidays to include Juneteenth Independence Day.
- Retail employers who choose to open on Juneteenth should ensure that employees are not being required to work if they do not wish to and that premium holiday pay is being provided to anyone who chooses to work on that day.
- If you are a Full-Service or Virtual HR client and would like our assistance with updating your handbook or holiday policies, please [email us](#).

The People Simplifying HR

For almost twenty years, HR Knowledge has made it our mission to demystify the complex and daunting process of HR management. We do more than just provide the level of service and technology you'd expect from an industry leader. We combine unparalleled passion for service with our decades of HR, payroll, and benefits experience to provide our clients with personalized and actionable advice that is second—to—none. From managed payroll to employee benefits to HR support, we can help your organization thrive, grow, and reduce operating costs—no matter what industry you serve. Whether you're interested in our Full-Service solution or just need your employee handbook written, HR Knowledge can help you minimize risk while staying on top of compliance regulations. The bottom line? We're not just another cloud-based technology company that also does HR, #WeAreHR. [Get the scoop](#) on how we can help you simplify HR.



@WEAREHRK