

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 21, 2022

President Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We write to you to urge you to continue the work you started last year when you signed the Juneteenth National Independence Day Act, and ask you to establish a Presidential Commission to study and issue proposals on a national apology and reparations for African Americans. We recognize and celebrate your signing of the Juneteenth National Independence Day Act last year, making Juneteenth a national holiday. Signing that legislation was a step towards reckoning with this country's history of slavery and systemic racism. It now serves as a national reminder of our violent and tragic past and of the enormous work that remains to be done to achieve the promise of equality for which so many in this country have fought.

As you recognized when you signed last year's legislation, this year's holiday should be "a Juneteenth of action on many fronts."¹ This year, you can fulfill that promise by using your executive authority to establish a commission to study reparations proposals for African Americans that will consider systemic discrimination that is an ongoing legacy of slavery. Each cosigner of this letter cosponsored S.40, The Commission to Study and Develop Reparations Proposals for African Americans Act, which would create such a commission. Numerous civil rights, racial and economic justice, and public interest groups have called upon your administration to establish this commission.² We now urge you to issue an executive order to establish such a commission so that we can move toward righting the wrongs of centuries of enslavement, segregation, discrimination, and subjugation of African Americans.

The legacy of slavery remains with us today and is compounded by ongoing racism and discrimination. The consequences for Black people in this country have been severe, continuous, and measurable. Black people in the United States are incarcerated at over five times the rate of white people, face an unemployment rate over twice that of white Americans, and have on average less than one-sixth the wealth of white households. Those clear and staggering racial disparities can be traced directly back to slavery, Jim Crow segregation, redlining, and ongoing systemic racism that has deprived Black families of wealth and opportunities for generations.

We must fully document the harms inflicted upon African Americans throughout our history, confront the egregious inequalities we see today with the knowledge of their deep roots, and seek to help African American families and communities realize the promise of equality and opportunity that this country has always purported to offer.

¹ "Remarks by President Biden at Signing of the Juneteenth National Independence Day Act." *The White House*. June 17, 2021. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2021/06/17/remarks-by-president-biden-at-signing-of-the-juneteenth-national-independence-day-act/>.

² Letter from Leadership Conference on Civil & Human Rights to President Biden. June 16, 2022.

You can help our nation progress toward that end by creating a commission that will study and document our history of slavery and discrimination, educate the public, and, importantly, recommend policy changes and monetary and other forms of compensation for the descendants of enslaved people. Issuing an executive order to create this commission would be a fitting way to demonstrate your continued commitment to pursuing racial justice and equality in this country.

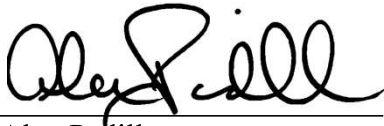
Sincerely,



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



Christopher A. Coons
United States Senator



Alex Padilla
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator



Bernard Sanders
United States Senator



Tina Smith
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Patty Murray
United States Senator



Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator



Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator