Assembly Resolution No. 1548

BY: M. of A. Peoples-Stokes

COMMEMORATING the 50th Annual Juneteenth Day celebration in Buffalo, New York

WHEREAS, Juneteenth, short for "June nineteenth," is a holiday commemorating the effective end of slavery in the United States on June 19, 1865, in Galveston, Texas; and

WHEREAS, On June 19, 1865, General Granger's Order No. 3 was read aloud to the people of Texas and stated: "The people of Texas are informed that in accordance with a Proclamation from the Executive of the United States, all slaves are free. This involves an absolute equity of rights and rights of property between masters and former slaves, and the connection heretofore existing between them becomes that between employer and free laborer."; and

WHEREAS, Juneteenth became a day of celebration and reflection for freed slaves and their descendants to recount the memories of that great day in 1865 when freedom was proclaimed; and

WHEREAS, While Juneteenth is a time for celebration, it is also a time for reflection, service, education, self-improvement, and respect for all cultures; celebration participants often listen to elders recount the past, attend prayer services, and learn from educational speakers; and

WHEREAS, In 1975, as America prepared to celebrate its bicentennial, many African Americans questioned whether the promises of freedom and equality truly included them; in Buffalo, members of the civil rights organization B.U.I.L.D. - "Build Unity, Independence, Liberty, and Dignity" - under the leadership of William L. Gaiter, then executive director of B.U.I.L.D., decided to create a celebration centered on Black history, culture, resilience, and freedom; and

WHEREAS, After hearing about the celebration in Galveston, Texas, Gaiter moved quickly with community leaders including Claudia M. Sims, Eugene L. Pierce, Judson Price, Enid Wright, Gail Wells, Roosevelt Wardlaw, and many others to organize Buffalo's first Juneteenth celebration; their goal was larger than a festival - it was about creating a movement rooted in pride, unity, and cultural identity; and

WHEREAS, In June 1975, B.U.I.L.D formed a coalition of block clubs, businesses, artists, educators, historians, clergy, and activists to plan the event; their efforts made Buffalo one of the first northern cities to establish a Juneteenth Festival; and

WHEREAS, On June 26, 1976, despite a week's delay caused by rain, Buffalo's first Juneteenth kicked off as planned; and

WHEREAS, The celebration opened with a parade along Jefferson Avenue featuring marching bands, drill teams, floats, dancers, and community

organizations; thousands lined the streets while vendors, artists, musicians, and poets transformed the neighborhood into a vibrant expression of Black culture and creativity; and

WHEREAS, An estimated 75,000 people attended the first festival with palpable joy; the community showed up and showed out with cheering crowds on Jefferson Avenue, running from East Delavan Avenue down to the War Memorial Stadium; new murals decorated vacant storefronts and the street was packed with vendors, poetry readings, art, music, dancers, and so much more; and

WHEREAS, Juneteenth in Buffalo represents more than a single celebration - it represents community ownership, Black pride, and cultural continuity that would be persevered for generations; and

WHEREAS, Buffalo's Juneteenth celebration has evolved into one of the largest celebrations in the nation; in 1985, the festival became its own independent organization; current Juneteenth President Carrone Evon Crump has carried the festival's torch of leadership and dedicated volunteers help sustain the festival year after year and truly reflects ordinary people doing extraordinary work for their community; and

WHEREAS, The festival endured through societal changes, economic struggles, and even the COVID-19 pandemic, during which the festival was celebrated online; in 2022, after the tragic massacre at Tops Friendly Markets on Buffalo's East Side, organizers debated whether the festival should continue that year, and after reflection, organizers decided the community needed Juneteenth more than ever; and

WHEREAS, That year, Juneteenth became not only a celebration, but also a place of healing, support, and unity for Buffalo's East Side community; and

WHEREAS, Today, Buffalo Juneteenth welcomes thousands annually and stands as a symbol of resilience, self-determination, and cultural pride; many who attended as children now serve as volunteers and board members, continuing the legacy which started nearly 50 years ago; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations commemorate the 50th Anniversary of Buffalo, New York's annual Juneteenth parade and celebration.