



**UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT**  
**EASTERN DISTRICT OF TENNESSEE**  
Joel W. Solomon United States Courthouse  
900 Georgia Avenue  
Chattanooga, Tennessee 37402

## **JULY 4, OUR NATION'S BIRTHDAY**

**July 2024**

*We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.*

These lofty and inspiring words are from the Declaration of Independence. Adopted on July 4, 1776, by the Continental Congress, these words have served as a symbol of hope, aspiration, freedom, and self-determination to peoples here in the United States and across the world. Although written for the then-inhabitants of Great Britain and its American colonies, these sentiments have resonated throughout the centuries since they were written.

We celebrate the adoption of the Declaration of Independence through our national Independence Day holiday each fourth of July. It is a holiday designed to celebrate the legacy handed down by the founders, as well as the ideas, ideals, and words they gave us. The Declaration of Independence serves as a reminder of the power of ideas and words to shape history and to inspire positive change.

The Declaration of Independence proclaimed our separation from Great Britain and announced the birth of a new nation among the nations of the Earth. The sentiments penned so many years ago are still salient in our nation today. Additionally, we also understand that the principles established in the Declaration of Independence expand beyond those understood as “men” at its ratification. Today, we firmly believe that all persons are created equal—that no person is better or greater than any other by reason of birth. We firmly believe that all persons are subject to the same laws as everyone else. We firmly believe that every person has the right to life and the right to liberty, and that these rights may not be taken from anyone without the due process of law. We firmly believe that all persons should have the right to pursue their personal advancement in their own ways. These beliefs have persisted as our guiding inspiration through the many trials and challenges the nation has faced over the years.

This Fourth of July finds us in turbulent times as we face bitterness, discord, and divisive issues. However, instead of succumbing to the divisiveness around us, let us use this Independence Day to reflect on all that binds us together and the enduring principles expressed in the Declaration

of Independence. After all, the principles established in the Declaration of Independence are what define us as Americans, not bitterness, discord, and divisiveness.

Much as the signers of the Declaration “mutually pledge[d] to each other [their] Lives, [their] Fortunes and [their] sacred Honor,” it is the individual responsibility of each of us to live up to the lofty words quoted above. The late Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall said it well on July 4, 1992, in accepting the Liberty Medal at Philadelphia’s Independence Hall: “We cannot play ostrich. Democracy just cannot flourish amid fear. Liberty cannot bloom amid hate. Justice cannot take root amid rage. America must get to work. . . . We can run from each other but we cannot escape each other. We will only attain freedom if we learn to appreciate what is different and muster the courage to discover what is fundamentally the same.”

Curtis L. Collier  
United States District Judge  
Chair, Eastern District of Tennessee Civics and Outreach Committee

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