

**NYS COMMUNITY COMMISSION ON REPARATIONS
REMEDIES
AUGUST 27, 2024**

BUSINESS MEETING MINUTES

LOCATION:

New York Empire State Plaza, Meeting Rm. 6, Albany, NY 12224

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Linda Brown-Robinson; Dr. Ron Daniels; Dr. Seanelle Hawkins; Timothy Hagues; Dr. Deborah Jenkins; Jennifer Jones Austin; and Linda Tarrant-Reid

MEMBERS EXCUSED:

Lurie Daniel Favors, Esq., and Dr. Darrick Hamilton

BILL SPONSORS:

Assembly Member Michaelle Solages and Senator James Sanders, Jr.

I. WELCOME

Chair Dr. Seanelle Hawkins called the meeting to order at 1:37pm and welcomed everyone to the second public convening of the **New York State Community Commission on Reparations Remedies**. Seven of the nine Commission members were present, and a quorum was confirmed.

Chair Hawkins thanked Senator James Sanders, Jr., Assembly Member Michaelle Solages, Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins, Assembly Member Carl Heastie, Governor Kathy Hochul, the New York State Office of General Services, and the Executive Chamber for all of the support and advocacy given to the Commission.

Chair Hawkins asked for a moment of silence in honor of civil rights activist, Dr. Alice Green, who passed away on August 20, 2024. Dr. Green dedicated her life to fighting for civil rights, and helping minorities and low-income families get justice in the criminal justice system.

Chair Hawkins also announced that August 26 was national Women's Equality Day, celebrating the great strides that women have made, and continue to make, to ensure equality for women.

Chair Hawkins announced that the Interim Operations Manager and Parliamentarian contractor positions have been posted on the Commission's website. She also stated that the Executive Director position is expected to be

posted on the website by the end of this week. <https://www.ny.gov/new-york-state-community-commission-reparations-remedies/commission-seeks-contractors-key-support>.

Chair Hawkins called for a roll call and confirmed the attendance of Commissioners Linda Brown-Robinson; Dr. Ron Daniels; Dr. Seanelle Hawkins; Timothy Hogues; Dr. Deborah Jenkins; Jennifer Jones Austin; and Linda Tarrant-Reid. Commissioners Lurie Daniel Favors, Esq. and Dr. Darrick Hamilton were both excused.

II. OATH OF OFFICE

At 1:41pm, Senator James Sanders, Jr. delivered the Oath of Office, swearing in Dr. Ron Daniels as a Commissioner with the **New York State Community Commission on Reparation Remedies**.

III. VOTES FOR VICE CHAIR, SECRETARY AND TREASURER POSITIONS

Chair Hawkins stated that the positions of Vice Chair, Secretary and Treasurer were to be discussed and voted on. The Commission's Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary and Treasurer will form the Executive Committee for the New York State Community Commission on Reparations Remedies.

- **VICE CHAIR:** At the meeting on July 27, nominations for the role of Vice Chair were raised for Commissioner Deborah Jenkins and Commissioner Dr. Ron Daniels. Due to the absence of Commissioner Daniel, the Commission decided to table the vote until the August meeting, when both parties would be present. Chair Hawkins asked and confirmed that there were no additional Commissioners interested in being considered for the role of Vice Chair. Commissioner Jenkins and Commissioner Daniels confirmed their interest in serving as Vice Chair for the Commission and provided introductory remarks.

Chair Hawkins called for a vote from the seven Commissioners for Commissioner Jenkins to serve as Vice Chair.

Ayes (3): Commissioner Hogues, Commissioner Tarrant-Reid, and Commissioner Deborah Jenkins

Chair Hawkins called for a vote from the seven Commissioners for Commissioner Daniels to serve as Vice Chair.

Ayes (3): Commissioner Daniels, Commissioner Brown-Robinson, and Commissioner Jones Austin

Chair Hawkins cast her vote of “aye” for Commissioner Jenkins, resulting in four “aye” votes for Commissioner Jenkins and 3 “aye” votes for Commissioner Daniels. Chair Hawkins and Commission members congratulated Commissioner Jenkins on her new role as Vice Chair for the Commission.

- **SECRETARY:** Chair Hawkins opened the floor to the Commissioners, accepting nominations for the role of Secretary.

Commissioner Jenkins nominated Commissioner Tarrant-Reid; and Commissioner Daniels nominated Commissioner Jones Austin. Commissioner Tarrant-Reid confirmed her interest in serving as the Secretary for the Commission. Commissioner Jones Austin respectfully declined.

MOTION: Commissioner Jenkins raised a motion for Commissioner Tarrant-Reid to serve as the Secretary. Commissioner Jones Austin seconded the motion; and all approved. Chair Hawkins and Commission members congratulated Commissioner Tarrant-Reid on her new role as Secretary for the Commission.

- **TREASURER:** Chair Hawkins opened the floor to the Commissioners, accepting nominations for the role of Treasurer.

Commissioner Hogues nominated Commissioner Jones Austin. Commissioner Jones Austin confirmed her interest in serving as Treasurer for the Commission.

MOTION: Commissioner Hogues raised a motion for Commissioner Jones Austin to serve as the Treasurer. Commissioner Brown-Robinson seconded the motion; Commissioner Jenkins abstained from voting; and the remaining four Commissioners approved. Chair Hawkins and Commission members congratulated Commissioner Jones Austin on her new role as Treasurer for the Commission.

IV. REVIEW OF REPARATIONS BILL

Commissioner Tarrant-Reid provided an overview of the Reparations Bill (S.1163-A/A.7691); tasks assigned to the Commission; and deadlines for these tasks.

V. PUBLIC HEARING AND RESOLUTION TO ALLOW VIDEOCONFERENCEING BY MEMBERS

Chair Hawkins reviewed the procedures for member videoconferencing, pursuant to Public Officers Law § 103-a and then opened the floor to the Commissioners for

discussion. Commissioner Jones Austin read the draft resolution which is posted on the Commission's website.

Commissioner Jones Austin asked for clarity on **Section 103-a(2)(c)** regarding the determination of a Commissioner's absence due to an "*extraordinary circumstance*". The Commission agreed that the Executive Committee would be responsible for reviewing and responding to these requests.

Commissioner Jones Austin stated that the Commission may want to review the **Procedures for Member Videoconferencing Pursuant to Public Officers Law § 103-a**, regarding the requirement of a "*4-day notice*" for any absence, as that is not always possible, especially with COVID and other potential health/personal issues.

Commissioner Brown-Robinson voiced the need for a regular cadence of meetings to be confirmed.

Commissioners made the recommendation to update the Resolution by: (1) adding a clause for extreme weather circumstances; (2) adding that the Executive Committee will be responsible for reviewing absence requests and will make the determination; and (3) changing the 4-day notice for an excused absence.

VI. BREAK

The Commission requested a 2-minute break at 2:41pm. At this time, Commissioner Brown-Robinson was excused from the remainder of the meeting.

VII. ADOPT PUBLIC COMMENT POLICY

Chair Hawkins opened the floor to the Commission regarding the drafted Public Comment Policy.

Commissioner Tarrant-Reid read the ***New York State Community Commission on Reparations Remedy Public Comment Policy***.

Commissioner Jones Austin asked the Commission to consider editing the statement in the **Eligibility** section: "*The Commission will accept as many in-person comments as possible within the time allotted for the meeting, ensuring that the meeting does not exceed its scheduled duration*" and stated that the Commission needs to hear from all members of the public, regardless of timing.

Commissioner Jones Austin asked the Commission to consider editing the statement in the **Sign-Up Policy** section: "*Individuals wishing to provide in-person comments must sign up prior to the start of the meeting.*" Commissioner Jones Austin stated that there are times when an agenda item is discussed and a

member of the public is moved by the discussion and wishes to speak, but would not be able to, due to the public comment sign-up procedure policy.

Commissioner Jones Austin raised a question on how the Commission will handle communication requests from the public or the media.

Commissioner Daniels discussed the need for a series of Town Halls/Public Forums across the state, so that the public has the ability to express their opinions in a venue other than the Commission's business meetings.

Commissioner Hogues requested the Commission (1) remove the sign-up qualification "**prior** to the start of the meeting"; (2) remove the "**allotted time**" for public comments; and (3) add that the Chair will inform the public "**30-minutes in advance**" that the public comment sign-up period is closing.

Commissioner Tarrant-Reid stated the need to capture the name and contact information of all public members who raise questions to the Commission. This needs to be captured on the Public Comment sign-up sheet.

MOTION: Commissioner Hogues made a motion to update the Public Comments Policy with the recommendations made. Commissioner Jenkins seconded the motion; all approved.

VIII. DISCUSSION ON SCHEDULE OF COMMISSION MEETINGS AND PUBLIC HEARINGS

Chair Hawkins previously sent the Commissioners a proposed listing of meetings for review and response.

ACTION ITEM: Commissioners received a listing of proposed Commission meetings and were asked to respond to the Doodle poll with their availability.
Submissions due: September 4

IX. DISCUSSION ON ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND GUIDING FRAMEWORK

Commissioner Jones Austin proposed a clear process for the Commission to consider. The Commission has a lot to accomplish in a short amount of time. The proposed process was broken down into 4 stages.

1. Launch of Commission: July – September 2024

Layout Commission policies, form governing body, and determine additional rolls needed

2. Historical Examination: October – December 2024

Perform historical research examining the harms of slavery; provide interim report based on research details

3. Creation of Recommendations: January – April 2025

Study and creation of remedies; meetings tailored to these discussions

4. Draft and Finalization of Report: May – July 2025

Translate into actual recommendations; finalize report

ACTION ITEM: Commission to provide report of findings and recommendations by September 4, 2025.

X. NEW BUSINESS

Chair Hawkins opened the floor to the Commissioners to discuss new business.

Process for engaging with members of the public:

Commissioner Jones Austin discussed the need to clearly define how Commissioners are to proceed when requested by the public and media to discuss the Commission's work.

Commissioner Daniels recommended that Chair Hawkins to be the representative for the Commission and can assign a designee in her absence.

Commissioner Tarrant-Reid recommended that the Commission develop a set of talking points to be used for public statements.

Chair Hawkins confirmed the need to have a clear policy on Commission communications are to be handled. The Chair will act as the primary spokesperson. The Commission will work on developing talking points to be used. The Commission will work towards hiring a Public Relations professional to help tighten messages and communications.

ACTION ITEM: Chair Hawkins stated that a policy will be drafted and talking points will be developed by the Commission.

XI. BREAK

The Commission requested a 2-minute break at 3:40pm. At this time, Commissioner Tarrant-Reid was excused from the remainder of the meeting.

XII. NEW BUSINESS (CONTINUED)

Chair Hawkins re-opened the floor to the Commissioners to continue the New Business discussion.

Commissioner Jones Austin recommended that all official invitations for Commissioners to speak at events be submitted electronically on the Commission's website.

Chair Hawkins also made the recommendation that for all informational/educational requested meetings, they must submit a set of questions which will be asked, in advance of the meeting, so that the talking points can be prepared.

Chair Hawkins encourages the public to utilize the "Contact Us" section on the Commission's website to submit feedback and recommendations.

Commissioner Jenkins added a request to hold the next Commission meeting in downstate New York.

Commissioner Hogues congratulated the Chair, Vice Chair and Treasurer for their commitment to the Commission and for their leadership.

XIII. PUBLIC COMMENTS

Chair Hawkins opened the floor for public comments and asked that comments be limited to two-minutes to allow for all to speak.

- Lunida Gresham, citizen/resident, congratulated Commissioner Jenkins on her new role of Vice Chair and was thankful to be able to attend the meeting in Albany.
- Leona Weeden, Co-Op City Reparations, asked the Commission to consider holding meetings in the evening or on the weekends in New York City. Leona expressed opposition to allowing the media to attend these meetings, as some may oppose the work of the Commission and can interfere with the forward moving progress.
- Jasmine Jordan, member of Grassroots Press, provided an overview of Reparations and New York's role as a pro-slavery state in the North. Slave labor built major companies that still exist today. New York was home to the largest plantation in the 13 colonies. Slaves helped to build the infrastructure for New York. Jasmine stated that the Freedman Foundation of Black Americans are owed back pay.
- Ras Jomo Akono stated that he had a few comments for the Commission to consider: (1) to include on the website how long after the meeting a comment can be submitted to be added into the record of the official meeting; (2) asked that the Commission be ultra mindful to include black media businesses wherever possible; and (3) that the Commission reach out to local teams, as

there are community groups who are working on reparations research and that information could be helpful for the Commission.

- Annette Wilcox, The United States Freedmen Project, asked the Commission to consider amending the 3-minute speaking limit to allow the public more time to speak. Annette stated that The United States Freedmen Project is a grassroots project that seeks to fulfill the goals of the Freedman's Bureau and Freedman Savings and Trust. Annette stated that the New York State Commission's reparations eligibility criteria minimizes the profound generational injustices which have been endured. Reparations are meant to address the civic historic injustices and focus on racial equity. Annette stated that Commission's "one size fits all eligibility approach" needs to be rejected and that reparations specifically address the generational injustices suffered by the descendants of slavery.
- Senator James Sanders, Jr., New York State Senator, stated that he applauds the Times Union for covering the Reparations hearing. Senator Sanders expressed the importance of having the public clearly identify themselves, prior to speaking. He asked that the Commissioners remember to use the microphones and speak loudly, so that all voices can be heard in the room and online. Senator Sanders thanked Assembly Member Solages and Senator Brisport for their support. Senator Sanders asked the Commission, once a Public Relations professional is hired, to work on proper notification and the importance of getting the information out to the public quickly. Senator Sanders recommended exploring other logistical options for future meetings and recommended continued use of existing logistical and administrative services. Senator Sanders asked the Commission to learn from California's Reparations Task Force and the work that they did.
- Devine Prince, The United States Freedmen Project, read the federal government's definition of an "African American." The United States Freedmen Project is the only organization advocating exclusively for Black Americans. Devine stressed the importance of making this work politically impossible to ignore. Devine implores the Commission to do what is legally and constitutionally sound, and that race-based policy is unconstitutional. Devine ended by stating that racial justice, though a worthy cause, is not the same as reparations for American Freedman families.

Chair Hawkins thanked everyone for coming and looks forward to the next meeting.

XIV. ADJOURNMENT

Meeting adjourned at 4:19pm.