



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

New York State Community Commission on Reparations Remedies to Host Public Hearing

Community invited to share testimonies on racially discriminatory criminal justice policies and practices

UTICA, N.Y. - November 26, 2025

The New York State Community Commission on Reparations Remedies (NYSCCRR) will continue its statewide series of public hearings with an in-person session on **Tuesday, Dec. 9, 2025, from 5:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. at The Carol L. Crooms BECA Center, [1105 Park Ave, Utica, NY.](#)**

The hearing will explore the theme: **“The War on Drugs: Racially Discriminatory Criminal Justice Policies and Practices.”** This session will focus on how decades of punitive drug laws, racial profiling, and unequal sentencing that devastated Black and Brown communities across New York State, fueling cycles of incarceration, economic instability, and intergenerational harm.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, sentences for drug offenders in New York State were among the most punitive in the country. New York’s approach to drug enforcement disproportionately targeted communities of color, resulting in long prison sentences for nonviolent offenses and the separation of countless families. Despite statewide reform efforts in recent years, the consequences of these policies continue to echo through disparities in policing, education, housing, and health outcomes.

“New Yorkers have lived with the consequences of policies that unfairly targeted certain communities,” said Dr. Seanelle Hawkins, Chair of the NYS Community Commission on Reparation Remedies. “This hearing allows us to hear directly from those affected so their insight informs the recommendations we bring to the state.”

The hearing will begin with brief updates from the Commission, followed by public testimony. Community members, advocates, formerly incarcerated individuals, researchers, faith leaders, and families affected by these policies are encouraged to attend and share personal experiences, documentation, or reparatory proposals.

Confirmed educational speakers for the Utica event include:

Toni Smith - New York State Director, Drug Policy Alliance.

Toni Smith is the New York State Director at the Drug Policy Alliance, where she works to advance local and state policies to reduce harms associated with drug use and drug criminalization. Prior to joining the Drug Policy Alliance, Toni was the Assistant Field Director at the New York Civil Liberties Union where she worked on campaigns to protect public education and promote racial justice. Through this work, she was named to the 2021 and 2022 City and State New York's Power 100 Education list. Toni graduated from Manhattanville College in 2003 with a degree in sociology. In 2022, Manhattanville College awarded Toni an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters for her advocacy for human rights and social justice.

Dr. Divine Pryor, CEO - People's Police Academy, Medgar Evers College

Dr. Divine Pryor is the CEO of the People's Police Academy at Medgar Evers College, where he brings together community leaders, law enforcement, and residents to collaboratively address public safety as a shared responsibility. A social scientist and formerly incarcerated advocate, he co-founded the Center for Nuleadership on Urban Solutions and has served on the National Re-entry Policy Council and as Co-Chair of New York State's Anti-Gang Violence Reduction Commission.

“These hearings are opportunities for communities in New York to be heard,” said Linda Brown-Robinson, Commissioner of the NYSCCRR. “For too long, the communities most affected by the War on Drugs have been excluded from decision-making. This hearing represents a step toward truth-telling and repair.”

EVENT DETAILS

Date: Tuesday, Dec. 9, 2025

Time: 5:30 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.

Location: The Carol L. Crooms BECA Center, 1105 Park Ave, Utica, NY

Parking: On-site and nearby street parking available

[\[Click to get directions\]](#)

Watch Online: Streaming link will be available at www.ny.gov/reparations

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About the NYS Community Commission on Reparations Remedies (NYSCCRR): The NYSCCRR is dedicated to engaging New Yorkers statewide in addressing the legacies of slavery and systemic discrimination. Through community engagement and rigorous research, the Commission strives to develop meaningful, actionable recommendations for reparative policies that foster justice and equity across New York State.

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