

DRAFT MEETING MINUTES

Commonwealth of Virginia

Commission to Study Slavery and Subsequent De Jure and De Facto Racial and Economic Discrimination Against African Americans

June 8, 2021, 1:00 p.m.
Virtual Meeting

Members present: Senator Mamie E. Locke; Delegate Delores L. McQuinn; Delegate Joshua G. Cole; Jody Lynn Allen; Andrea Douglas; John W. Kinney; Cassandra L. Newby-Alexander; Xavier Richardson; Karen Sherry; and Daniel P. Watkins. Absent: Edward L. Ayers.

Call to Order

Amigo Wade, acting director of the Division of Legislative Services, called the first meeting of the Commission to Study Slavery and Subsequent De Jure and De Facto Racial and Economic Discrimination Against African Americans to order. He verified that a quorum was present and proceeded to the first order of business, the election of a Chair and Vice Chair of the Commission.

Election of Chair and Vice Chair

Mr. Wade opened the floor for nominations for the positions of chair and vice chair. Dr. Cassandra Newby-Alexander nominated Delegate Delores McQuinn to serve as chair of the Commission. There were no other nominations, and the Commission members present voted unanimously to approve Delegate McQuinn as Chair. Dr. Newby-Alexander then nominated Senator Mamie Locke to serve as Vice Chair of the Commission. There were no other nominations, and the Commission members present voted unanimously to approve Senator Locke as Vice Chair.

Introduction of Members and Comments

Delegate McQuinn stated how pleased she was that the Commission was finally able to hold its first meeting, and thanked the Commission members for agreeing to serve. She then asked the members to introduce themselves and say a few words about what they hoped the Commission would accomplish. After each member had spoken, she offered her thoughts and aspirations for the Commission and expressed her concern that the delay in launching the Commission would make it difficult to complete the work by the current sunset date of July 1, 2022.

Review of Enabling Legislation

Delegate McQuinn asked Mr. Wade to review the legislation that established the Commission in 2020. He walked the group through the provisions of §§ 2.2-2551 through 2.2-2557 of the Code of Virginia, focusing on the Commission's powers and duties as outlined in § 2.2-2555. The

legislation asks the Commission to document the history of slavery from 1619 through 1865, describe the role that the federal and state governments and laws played in permitting discrimination against African Americans from 1865 to the present, and record the continuing negative impact that slavery and racial discrimination have had on Virginians of color. Specifically, the Commission is charged with looking at the institutional systems that still maintain inequities in housing, employment, education, economic opportunity, generational wealth, voting rights, and criminal justice. The Commission is also responsible for recommending ways to make the public more aware of these historically based inequities and suggesting solutions that will improve the quality of life for African American families in the Commonwealth. He reminded the members that the Commission will need to submit an annual report to the Governor and the General Assembly and a summary of the Commission's interim activity before the start of the regular session of the General Assembly.

Research Process

Delegate McQuinn invited Sandra Treadway and Gregg Kimball, with the Library of Virginia, to discuss preliminary plans for conducting the research to support the Commission's work. Dr. Treadway stated that the Library was honored to have been asked to staff the Commission and affirmed the agency's commitment to draw on its collections, information resources, and staff expertise to advance the Commission's mission. Dr. Kimball reported on work that his staff had begun while waiting for the Commission to get started, pulling together bibliographies of the best scholarship on the history of slavery and assembling links to existing studies and data that examine many of the systemic inequities that the Commission will be looking at. The goal is to build on but not re-do work that other organizations may have done. He explained that Library staff would be able to assist with much of the Commission's work, but that he anticipated needing help in areas that lie outside the Library's expertise-- areas such as housing, health, criminal justice, and economic opportunity. He hopes to help the Commission identify subject experts in these areas who might be brought in to share their insights and perspective. As the legislation creating the Commission allows for contracting with consultants and others to carry out the work, Dr. Kimball suggested that it would be helpful if the Commission would consider hiring a project manager who could stay on top of all aspects of the work and assist in preparing the required reports.

Budget and Timeline

Delegate McQuinn confirmed that the General Assembly had allocated funds in its last budget to support the Commission's work and asked the status of this funding since the Commission had not been able to use any of the funds in FY 2021. Mr. Wade stated that the money had been placed in the Division of Legislative Service's appropriation, and he confirmed that the funding specified for FY 21 could carry over to the upcoming fiscal year. Delegate McQuinn stated that given the pandemic and the delayed start of the Commission, as well as the wide scope and importance of the work that needed to be done, she intended to propose an extension of the Commission beyond July 2022 during the next session of the General Assembly.

Discussion

The members of the Commission enthusiastically agreed with Delegate McQuinn's proposal to extend the Commission's timeframe. In looking ahead to future meetings, Delegate McQuinn invited Commission members to recommend people they know who are subject experts in the

areas outlined in the legislation. The members agreed with the idea of hiring a project coordinator for the work of the Commission. Delegate McQuinn suggested that a subcommittee of the Commission work with Dr. Kimball and Mr. Wade to develop a position description, a process, and a time frame for recruiting a qualified individual. She asked Senator Locke to chair the subcommittee and Dr. Sherry and Dr. Kinney to serve on the subcommittee with her. Senator Locke indicated she would try to schedule a subcommittee meeting as soon as possible. Delegate McQuinn stated that she would also look at the calendar and try to schedule future meeting dates for the full Commission soon.

Public Comment

Members of the public were provided a link to register if they wished to address the Commission. No one registered to do so, and there were no comments from the public.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 2:35pm.