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## Commission to Study the History of the Uprooting of Black Communities by Public Institutions of Higher Education in the Commonwealth

August 20, 2024, at 1:00 p.m.

General Assembly Building, House Room B-205

<https://studies.virginiageneralassembly.gov/studies/720>

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The Commission to Study the History of the Uprooting of Black Communities by Public Institutions of Higher Education in the Commonwealth (the Commission) met in Richmond with Delegate Delores L. McQuinn, chair, presiding.<sup>1</sup> The meeting began with the election of Delegate McQuinn as chair and Senator Lamont Bagby as vice-chair followed by presentations and discussion. Materials presented at the meeting are accessible through the [Commission's meetings webpage](#).

### Adoption of Virtual Meeting Policy

Ashley Binns, Senior Attorney with the Division of Legislative Services and staff for the Commission, gave attendees a summary of the virtual meeting policy as outlined in [§ 2.2-3708.3](#) of the Virginia Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). In a unanimous vote, the Commission adopted the virtual meeting policy.

### Overview of Paragraph U of Budget Item 1 of HB 6001 (Torian, 2024 Special Session I)

*Julia Bergamini, Staff Attorney, Division of Legislative Services*

Ms. Bergamini provided an overview of paragraph U of Budget Item 1 of HB 6001, which established the Commission and its duties. She highlighted the overall purpose of the Commission, which is to study and determine (i) whether any public institution of higher education in the Commonwealth has purchased, expropriated, or otherwise taken possession of property owned by any individual or entity within the boundaries of a community in which a majority of the residents are Black in order to establish or expand the institution's campus and (ii) whether and what form of compensation or relief would be appropriate for any individual described in clause (i) or any of his lineal descendants.

Ms. Bergamini also reviewed the duties of the Commission, which are as follows: (a) consult with each public institution of higher education in the Commonwealth to determine whether the institution has purchased, expropriated, or otherwise taken possession of property owned by any individual within the boundaries of a community in which a majority of the residents are Black in order to establish or expand such institution's campus; (b) research whether such acquisitions

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<sup>1</sup> **Members Present:** Delegate Delores L. McQuinn (chair), Senator J.D. "Danny" Diggs, Senator David W. Marsden, Delegate Bonita G. Anthony, Delegate Karen Keys-Gamarra, Delegate Anne Ferrell Tata, Peter A. Blake, Dr. Byron Cherry, A. Scott Fleming, Joni Ivey, Nicholas Kent (designee for Secretary Aimee Rogstad Guidera), Dr. Cassandra L. Newby-Alexander

**Members Absent:** Senator Lamont Bagby (vice-chair), Senator Mamie E. Locke, Delegate Ellen H. Campbell, Delegate Jeion A. Ward, Carl Edmonds, Julian Maxwell Hayter, Dr. Maureen Elgersman Lee

have occurred in other states; (c) analyze whether and what form of compensation or relief would be appropriate for any individual described in clause (a) or any of his lineal descendants; and (d) consult with experts to assist the Commission in carrying out its duties.

### **Presentation: *Uprooted* Documentary**

*Brandi Kellam, Journalist and Film Director*

Ms. Kellam, a director, researcher, and journalist who directed the award-winning documentary *Uprooted*, which was produced by the Virginia Center for Investigative Journalism at WHRO and ProPublica, told the Commission that the purpose of the documentary was to inform the public about the demolition of Black neighborhoods that occurred as a result of the expansion and formulation of public institutions of higher education in the Commonwealth, specifically Christopher Newport University (CNU) in Newport News. She provided insight into the research process for the documentary, including the barriers that were encountered in trying to obtain materials and historical data related to the actions of public institutions of higher education in Black neighborhoods, and emphasized the documentary's use of oral histories from residents in the area or their direct descendants in an effort to accurately tell the story of what occurred in the Black communities affected by such actions, hold accountable the public institutions of higher education involved, and repair the damage that was done.

The Commission discussed several points raised by Ms. Kellam's presentation, including the need to advocate for materials and historical data related to the actions of such public institutions of higher education to be made public, and the Commission's approach to carrying out its duties.

The Commission unanimously voted to establish a clear plan of action for its work at its next meeting.

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For more information, see the [\*Commission's website\*](#) or contact the Division of Legislative Services staff:

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