



## Virginia Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Commission

December 13, 2021, at 1:30 p.m.

Pocahontas Building, Senate Committee Room A

[mlkcommission.dls.virginia.gov](http://mlkcommission.dls.virginia.gov)

The Virginia Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Commission (the Commission) met in Richmond with Senator Jennifer L. McClellan, chair, presiding.<sup>1</sup> The meeting began with introductions and opening remarks followed by presentations and discussion. Materials presented at the meeting are accessible through the [Commission's meetings webpage](#). Video of the meeting is archived on the [Senate of Virginia's Video Stream](#) page.

### Emancipation and Freedom Monument

*Amigo Wade, Director, Division of Legislative Services; Senator Jennifer L. McClellan, Chair*  
*Report on Monument Completion*

Mr. Wade updated the Commission on the completion of the Emancipation and Freedom Monument (the Monument) in September 2021. The Commission completed its fundraising campaign through its fiscal agent, the Virginia Capitol Foundation, in 2021 and made its final payment to the artist, Thomas Jay Warren, upon final approval of the Monument in September. The project to construct the Monument, dedicated to the contributions of African American Virginians in the fight for freedom, had been ongoing since 2013. The Monument was dedicated and unveiled in a ceremony on Brown's Island on September 22, 2021. Total project costs amounted to \$1,184,102.07.

The Monument's dedication and unveiling ceremony was recorded and livestreamed by Virginia Public Media and is available on the Commission's website.

### *Future Plans for Monument Site*

Senator McClellan noted that in the process of creating the Monument, the Commission solicited nominations for African American Virginians to be featured on the base of the Monument. Out of more than 100 nominations received, and after a series of public hearings across the state, the Commission's Virginians on the Monument Work Group recommended 10 individuals for inclusion on the Monument, which the Commission approved in 2017: Gabriel, Nat Turner, Dred

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<sup>1</sup> **Members Present:** Senator Jennifer L. McClellan (chair), Delegate Delores L. McQuinn (vice-chair), Senator Adam P. Ebbin, Senator Mamie E. Locke, Delegate Betsy B. Carr (virtual), Delegate Joshua G. Cole, Delegate Thomas C. Wright, Jr., Reverend Ricardo Brown, Dr. Ronald L. Carey, Dr. Matthew S. Gibson, Dr. Laurant L. Lee, Kirk T. Schroder, J.D., Ph.D.

**Members Absent:** Senator William M. Stanley, Jr., Delegate C. Matthew Fariss, Delegate Roslyn C. Tyler, Rabbi Bruce Aft, Edward McCoy, Paula P. Williams

Scott, William Harvey Carney, Mary Jane Richards Bowser, Reverend Wyatt Tee Walker, John Mercer Langston, Lucy Simms, John Mitchell, Jr., and Rosa Dixon Bowser.

The Commission discussed ways that the other nominees for inclusion on the Monument might be honored at the Monument site, including by inscribing individuals' names on bricks within the Monument's plaza. Senator McClellan said that the initial nomination process took place several years ago and may need to be reopened to new nominees. Dr. Matthew S. Gibson, Executive Director of Virginia Humanities, noted that the Commission would need to be clear in its criteria for inclusion in the plaza due to the limitations of the physical space. The Commission voted to charge the Virginians on the Monument Work Group with developing a proposal for including the names of additional African American Virginians in the Monument's plaza.

### **Tribute to Senator Yvonne B. Miller**

*Senator McClellan, Chair*

Senator McClellan reported that the Commission, having finished work on the Monument, will begin planning for a memorial tribute to Senator Yvonne B. Miller to be placed in Capitol Square or another location chosen by the Commission. The Commission is receiving a \$50,000 budget appropriation for fiscal year 2022 to begin this process. The Commission discussed possibilities for a memorial tribute in the form of a statue or bust, a portrait, or inclusion in the Virginia Women's Monument on Capitol Square. A work group will be appointed to develop a proposal for recognizing Senator Miller.

### **King Holiday Commemorations**

*Rick Tatnall, Replenish Richmond; Senator McClellan, Chair*

#### ***MLK Freedom Fest***

Mr. Tatnall of Replenish Richmond invited the Commission to participate as a partner in the MLK Freedom Fest on January 15, 2022, from 1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m., celebrating the life of Dr. King on his birthday. The event will take place in the area on, under, and surrounding the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Bridge in Richmond and is the first event in what is intended to be an annual celebration. The Commission agreed to serve as a partner in hosting the event and to provide informational materials and other support for the program, subject to approval by the chair.

#### ***Commission Commemoration of the King Holiday***

Senator McClellan presented a letter submitted to the members of the Commission by Rev. Tyler Millner, a former member of the Commission, urging the Commission to take an active role in commemorating the King Holiday. Due to the timing of the legislative session, the Commission has not regularly held major annual commemorations in January. The Commission agreed to increase its commemorative activities for the 2022 holiday by publishing an op-ed ahead of the holiday, working with the Governor's office to issue a proclamation urging Virginians to honor the holiday, and creating a video for the Commission's social media. Senator McClellan will also give a speech, annually given by the chair of the Commission, on the floor of the Senate to honor Dr. King on his birthday.

The Commission agreed to form a work group to convene in 2022 with the purpose of developing permanent and ongoing King Holiday programming for the 2023 holiday and beyond.



## **Virginia Union University Community Leaders Celebration**

*Senator McClellan, Chair*

The Commission voted to purchase a \$2,000 community sponsorship package for Virginia Union University's Community Leaders Celebration on Monday, January 17, 2022. The Commission annually purchased a table at the event until 2021 when the event was held virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The event will be held virtually again in 2022.

## **King in Virginia Programming**

*Senator McClellan, Chair*

In 2018 and 2019, the Commission, led by the King in Virginia Work Group, held a series of Beloved Community Conversations around the state in each of the 13 localities in Virginia that Dr. King visited during his lifetime. Senator McClellan proposed holding an additional Beloved Community Conversation at Virginia State University in Petersburg, where Dr. King visited and spoke several times. A Beloved Community Conversation was previously held at Gillfield Baptist Church in Petersburg in 2018.

Dr. Laurant L. Lee said that Theresa Ann Walker, noted civil rights activist and widow of Dr. King's chief of staff, Reverend Wyatt Tee Walker, still lives in the area. Dr. Lee recommended that the Commission find a way to honor Mrs. Walker and acknowledge her contributions. Senator McClellan suggested inviting Mrs. Walker to participate in the Beloved Community Conversation at Virginia State University. The Commission will also consider additional ways to honor Mrs. Walker.

The Commission decided that the King in Virginia Work Group will be convened to consider whether the Beloved Community Conversations should be continued and held in new locations across Virginia, including locations not visited by Dr. King, or whether the localities where events were held in 2018 and 2019 should be revisited. Members of the Commission also discussed hosting a student art contest related to the King in Virginia project and displaying student artwork in the State Capitol during the legislative session.

## **History of Lynching in Virginia Work Group Updates**

*Senator McClellan, Chair*

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the History of Lynching in Virginia Work Group was unable to plan in-person programming in 2021 and intends to resume programming in 2022, with events to be held in Richmond, Northern Virginia, Danville, Hampton Roads, and Culpeper.

Local groups continued to host virtual events and dedicate historic markers recognizing Virginia's history of lynching throughout the year. In September, a Virginia Department of Historic Resources historic marker was placed in Wise County, recognizing the lynching of Leonard Woods. Another historic marker will be unveiled on December 18, 2021, in Essex County to recognize the lynching of Thomas Washington.

## **2022 Resolutions**

*Senator McClellan, Chair*

The Commission did not make any recommendations regarding resolutions to be put forth by the Commission in the 2022 Session.



## Next Meeting

Members will be polled for the date of the Commission's next meeting, which will be held in spring 2022. Delegate Delores L. McQuinn noted that Delegate Joshua G. Cole will not be returning to his House seat in 2022, and the members thanked him for his service on the Commission.

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

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