

COMMISSION ON RACE & ACCESS TO OPPORTUNITY

Minutes

August 27, 2024

Call to Order and Roll Call

The Commission on Race and Access to Opportunity held its third meeting on August 27, 2024, at 1:00 PM in Room 129 of the Capitol Annex. Senator Amanda Mays Bledsoe, Chair, called the meeting to order, and the secretary called the roll.

Present were:

Members: Senator Amanda Mays Bledsoe, Co-Chair; Representative Killian Timoney, Co-Chair; Senators Karen Berg and Gerald A. Neal; Representatives George Brown Jr. and Samara Heavrin; Lyndon Pryor and Katima Smith-Willis.

Guests: Senator Reginald Thomas, Senate District 13, Partner, Living the Dream Stables; Gregory Harbut, President, Harbut Bloodstock Agency and Chairman, Ed Brown Society; Clark Williams, President and Co-Founder, Ed Brown Society; Shania Rayford, Program Coordinator, Ed Brown Society; Sean and Tia Edwards, Founders and Owners, Fresh Bourbon Distilling Co.; Ashley C. Smith, Co-Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Black Soil KY; Dr. Marcus Bernard, PhD, Dean, College of Agriculture, Health, and Natural Resources, and Director of Land Grant Programs, Kentucky State University; and Anthony Jackson, Jr., President, KSU Minorities in Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Related Sciences.

LRC Staff: Brandon White and Logan Schaaf.

Introduction of New Member

The commission recognized Ms. Katima Smith-Willis as a newly appointed citizen member.

Approval of July Minutes

The minutes from the July 29, 2024 meeting were approved.

Minority Experiences within the Equine, Bourbon, and Agriculture Industries

Equine

Senator Reginald Thomas, Senate District 13, and Partner, Living the Dream Stables; Gregory Harbut, President, Harbut Bloodstock Agency and Chairman, Ed Brown Society; Clark Williams, President and Co-Founder, Ed Brown Society; and Shania Rayford, Program Coordinator, Ed Brown Society, discussed their work, the history of African Americans in the equine industry, barriers to success, and the Ed Brown Society's engagement model to

Committee meeting materials may be accessed online at <https://apps.legislature.ky.gov/CommitteeDocuments/345>

recruit students to the industry.

The Ed Brown Society's mission is to celebrate the rich history of African Americans in the equine industry and to create opportunities for young people of color to gain exposure, training, and experience in the thoroughbred industry. It is named for Edward Dudley Brown, a legendary jockey, trainer, and horse owner who was born into slavery and went on to win the Belmont Stakes as a jockey, the Kentucky Derby as a trainer, and established his own stable in Lexington, later moving to Churchill Downs.

Barriers faced by students of color in the industry include a lack of representation, limited access to exposure and opportunities, limited networking opportunities, cultural barriers, educational gaps, stereotypes about horse ownership, and a lack of role models. The Ed Brown Society addresses these barriers through recruitment, mentoring and coaching, industry orientation, personal development, experiential learning, and industry placement. They provide scholarships, fellowships, and internships, host days at the track, a speaker series, and student meetups, and partner with Keeneland, Churchill Downs, and other major industry institutions to open up opportunities for students of color.

On behalf of the Ed Brown Society, Mr. Williams requested state funding for an ongoing \$50,000 per year contribution to the scholars and fellows fund.

Senator Neal praised the Ed Brown Society's work and requested a prospectus for the potential state investment.

Responding to a question from Co-Chair Mays Bledsoe, Mr. Williams said that Lexington schools take field trips to Keeneland to introduce students to the equine world.

Responding to a question from Representative Brown, Mr. Williams discussed the history of discrimination against African American jockeys. Representative Brown encouraged everyone to visit the Isaac Murphy Memorial Gardens in Lexington.

Responding to a question from Ms. Smith-Willis, Mr. Williams discussed the Ed Brown Society's outreach to high school students.

Co-Chair Timoney emphasized the wide range of opportunities in the equine industry, including farm management, breeding, and nutrition.

Mr. Williams noted the importance of not pitting progress against protest and emphasized the role for both.

Ms. Rayford discussed her introduction to the Ed Brown Society and the opportunities it

opened for her during school and after.

Bourbon

Senator Thomas introduced Sean and Tia Edwards, Founders and Owners of Fresh Bourbon Distilling Co., the first African American owned bourbon distilling company in Kentucky.

Mr. and Mrs. Edwards discussed their work in the bourbon industry and the experiences and barriers they have encountered since founding Fresh Bourbon in 2017.

In 2020, they were recognized as the first African Americans to make bourbon in Kentucky since slavery.

They have faced challenges in the industry stemming from people's prejudices and misconceptions about their company. Particularly in banking, which is built largely on prior relationships and connections, Fresh Bourbon has encountered difficulties in securing capital and scaling their operation in ways that other companies have not. Mr. Edwards noted that the federal government provided \$117 million to Kentucky to invest in underrepresented communities for innovation and opportunities. The state directed those funds to Keyhorse Capital, which has not been open to communication with Fresh Bourbon.

Senator Neal emphasized the importance of addressing the barriers Mr. and Mrs. Edwards discussed and praised their work.

Responding to questions from Ms. Smith-Willis, Mrs. Edwards said that the more that people request Fresh Bourbon in restaurants, the more difficult it will be for restaurants to ignore. Mr. Edwards said that from a policy standpoint, tax incentives to banks that work with underrepresented communities could be valuable. Mr. Edwards highlighted Fresh Bourbon's outreach efforts.

Representative Brown and Co-Chair Timoney praised Mr. and Mrs. Edwards and their work.

Co-Chair Mays Bledsoe highlighted entrepreneurial opportunities available through the University of Kentucky.

Agriculture

Ashley C. Smith, Co-Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Black Soil KY; Dr. Marcus Bernard, PhD, Dean, College of Agriculture, Health, and Natural Resources, and Director of Land Grant Programs, Kentucky State University; and Anthony Jackson, Jr., President, KSU Minorities in Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Related Sciences, provided an overview of

the agricultural field in the state and discussed their work.

Ms. Smith highlighted the mission and vision of Black Soil KY, which is to reconnect Black Kentuckians to their legacy and heritage in agriculture. By bringing together urban families with rural and urban-based Black farmers, growers, and producers across the state, they help introduce opportunities in agriculture that promote self-sufficiency, encourage healthy living, and activate cooperative economics. Black Soil KY's vision is to help foster a greater market share for Black farmers and producers as they provide healthy food options to a larger consumer base.

Dr. Bernard discussed the importance of agriculture for the state and its future prospects, and Kentucky State University's work on this front.

Mr. Jackson discussed his educational path and his passion for food advocacy, particularly in the area of food disparities.

Responding to a question from Co-Chair Timoney, Ms. Smith provided an overview of the work of Black farmers throughout the history of the United States and the factors behind so many Black farmers leaving the industry.

Representative Brown emphasized the importance of the presentation and discussed the lack of diversity in the agricultural industry stemming from historical and ongoing injustices.

Responding to a question from Co-Chair Timoney, Ms. Smith highlighted the problem of food insecurity and some of the factors behind it. Mr. Jackson emphasized the failure of the country to see Reconstruction era reforms and reparations through, and the effects of that failure that continue today.

Adjournment

With no further business before the commission, the meeting was adjourned at 3:15 PM.