

COMMISSION ON RACE & ACCESS TO OPPORTUNITY

Minutes

July 29, 2025

Call to Order and Roll Call

The second meeting of the Commission on Race and Access to Opportunity was held on July 29, 2025, at 1:00 PM at Kentucky State University. Representative Kevin Jackson, Chair, called the meeting to order, and the secretary called the roll.

Present were:

Members: Representative Kevin Jackson, Co-Chair; Senator Amanda Mays Bledsoe, Co-Chair; Senators Karen Berg, Keturah Herron, and Lindsey Tichenor; and Representative George Brown Jr..

Guests: Dr. Koffi C. Akakpo, President, Kentucky State University (KSU); Michael R. DeCourcy, Vice President of External Relations and Institutional Advancement, KSU; and Rev. Dr. Frank Smith Jr., Senior Vice President and Chief Operating Officer, Simmons College of Kentucky.

LRC Staff: Brandon White and Logan Schaaf.

Informational Meeting

A quorum was not present.

Discussion on Kentucky's Historically Black Colleges and Universities

Dr. Koffi C. Akakpo, President, Kentucky State University (KSU); Michael R. DeCourcy, Vice President of External Relations and Institutional Advancement, KSU; and Rev. Dr. Frank Smith Jr., Senior Vice President and Chief Operating Officer, Simmons College of Kentucky, provided an overview of the operations of KSU and Simmons College of Kentucky.

Dr. Akakpo emphasized the enduring value of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in workforce development, innovation, civic leadership, and economic mobility. He also discussed KSU's new degree programs, health initiatives, and partnerships.

Responding to Chair Jackson, Dr. Akakpo estimated the new nursing facility could double or triple enrollment at KSU.

Responding to Co-Chair Mays Bledsoe, Dr. Akakpo discussed KSU's strategy of emphasizing science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) programs, in

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addition to the teacher education program.

Responding to Senator Herron, Dr. Akakpo discussed KSU's prison education program.

Representative Brown emphasized the value of HBCUs and discussed their history.

Responding to Senator Tichenor, Dr. Akakpo discussed efforts to improve student success. He also noted teachers are increasingly asked to navigate students' social needs and to provide more support to students.

Dr. Smith provided data on the national impact of HBCUs and discussed the history of Simmons College, its academic programs, executive leadership academy, and future goals, including campus and degree program expansion.

Chair Jackson praised Dr. Smith and the work of Simmons College.

Responding to Co-Chair Mays Bledsoe, Dr. Smith said Simmons' reception of HBCU status has allowed them to receive federal funding and discussed the expanded opportunities available to the college and its students. He noted Pell Grant funding is available to all students and discussed the challenges facing private and faith-based HBCUs.

Responding to Representative Brown, Dr. Smith discussed the disparity in endowments for HBCUs and the need for federal funding to expand opportunities. He also highlighted the changing accreditation landscape and the ways HBCUs work with limited resources.

Adjournment

With no further business before the commission, the meeting adjourned at 2:25 PM.