

COMMISSION ON RACE & ACCESS TO OPPORTUNITY

Minutes

September 23, 2025

Call to Order and Roll Call

The fourth meeting of the Commission on Race & Access to Opportunity was held on September 23, 2025, at 1:00 PM in Room 129 of the Capitol Annex. 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 Keturah J. Herron and Lindsey Tichenor; and Representatives George Brown Jr., Samara Heavrin, and Nima Kulkarni; and Larry Forester.

Guests: Rob Clayton, Superintendent, Warren County Public Schools (WCPS); Dr. Sarah Johnson, Assistant Superintendent, WCPS; William Spalding, Multilingual Learner Specialist, Office of Teaching and Learning, Kentucky Department of Education (KDE); Micki Ray Marinelli, Chief Academic Officer, Office of Teaching and Learning, KDE; Representative Kulkarni, Executive Director, New Americans Initiative; Marilyn Daniel, Vice-President, Community Response Coalition of Kentucky (CRCKY); Jenna Potter, Outreach Coordinator, CRCKY; and Martha Kikoko, Outreach Coordinator, CRCKY.

LRC Staff: Brandon White and Logan Schaaf.

Approval of August Minutes

The minutes of the August 26, 2025, meeting were approved by voice vote without objection.

Introduction of New Member

Chair Jackson introduced Larry Forester, Senior Vice President, Forcht Bank, as the newest member of the commission.

Warren County Public Schools

Rob Clayton, Superintendent, WCPS, and Dr. Sarah Johnson, Assistant Superintendent, WCPS, provided an overview of multilingual students in the district. Over 5,500 multilingual students, representing over 90 countries, are enrolled in WCPS. Multilingual program needs include funding, more staff, translation services for students and families, and, on the testing and accountability side, additional years to learn, speak, read, and write in English.

Responding to Co-Chair Mays Bledsoe, the presenters discussed graduation rates and academic performance. They also highlighted the potential benefits of artificial intelligence translation programs and other resources for multilingual students and families.

Responding to Senator Tichenor, Dr. Johnson discussed data collection practices for multilingual student performance.

Responding to Representative Heavrin, Mr. Clayton said he has confidence in the KDE because of their responsiveness working with WCPS.

Responding to Chair Jackson, Mr. Clayton said WCPS spends approximately \$17 million on special education and \$7.5 million annually on multilingual education.

Department of Education

William Spalding, Multilingual Learner Specialist, Office of Teaching and Learning, KDE, and Micki Ray Marinelli, Chief Academic Officer, Office of Teaching and Learning, KDE, provided an overview of English and multilingual learner student populations across the state. They highlighted KDE strategies for strengthening support for schools and districts, including expansion of state-level staffing, streamlined communication from KDE to school districts, and state-level guidance promoting high quality instruction for English language development.

Responding to Chair Jackson, Ms. Marinelli said KDE looks forward to continuing to work with the legislature to support English and multilingual learners.

New Americans Initiative

Representative Kulkarni, Executive Director, New Americans Initiative, discussed issues relating to the integration of immigrant communities. She highlighted barriers to integration, including the complex legal status process, unrecognized credentials, high tuition costs, language barriers, and restricted access to certain careers. Achieving permanent residence and citizenship is crucial because it provides streamlined access to opportunities, easier credential recognition, affordable education, full civic access, and expanded career pathways.

Representative Kulkarni provided an overview of immigrant economic contributions to the state, and the work of the New Americans Initiative.

Community Response Coalition

Marilyn Daniel, Vice-President, CRCKY; Jenna Potter, Outreach Coordinator, CRCKY; and Martha Kikoko, Outreach Coordinator, CRCKY, discussed the work of their organization, barriers to immigrant integration, and potential solutions to address these barriers. These

solutions include more training for employees of the Department for Community Based Services, better employee training relating to immigrants for Department of Motor Vehicles employees, increased funding for English language learner programs, better planning for immigrant housing needs, and increased support for licensure in underserved professions.

Responding to Co-Chair Mays Bledsoe, Ms. Potter said other states are using individual taxpayer identification numbers (ITINs) for car registration for immigrants.

Adjournment

With no further business before the commission, the meeting was adjourned at 2:35 PM.