

COMMISSION ON RACE & ACCESS TO OPPORTUNITY

Minutes

July 20, 2026

Call to Order and Roll Call

The second meeting of the Commission on Race & Access to Opportunity was held on July 20, 2026, at 3:00 PM ET/2:00 PM CT, 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 Kevin Jackson, Co-Chair; Senators Karen Berg and Keturah J. Herron; Representatives George Brown Jr., Samara Heavrin, and Nima Kulkarni; and Kimberly Baird and Larry Forester.

Guests: Mark Ludwig, Executive Director, National Council for Equal Shared Parenting; David Cozart, Founder and Chief Visionary Officer, Commonwealth Center for Fathers and Families (CCFF); Joel Griffith, CCFF Board of Directors; Ebony O'Rea, CCFF Senior Regional Engagement Officer (Louisville); and Tyler Barrett, CCFF Regional Engagement Agent (Eastern KY).

LRC Staff: Brandon White and Logan Schaaf.

Approval of June Meeting Minutes

A motion was made by Co-Chair Jackson and seconded by Mr. Forester to approve the minutes of the June 17, 2026, meeting. The minutes were approved by voice vote without objection.

A Discussion on Family and Fatherhood

Mark Ludwig, Executive Director of the National Council for Equal Shared Parenting, delivered a presentation on fatherhood engagement. Mr. Ludwig discussed the societal costs of fatherlessness, including increased rates of drug abuse, crime, incarceration, mental illness, and school dropouts. He emphasized the benefits of fatherhood engagement programs, including law enforcement and prison cost savings, and provided six recommendations for Kentucky: expand fatherhood engagement programs; encourage community partnerships; improve father outreach; track measurable

outcomes; evaluate long-term taxpayer savings; and continue legislative leadership in strengthening fathers and families.

Responding to Senator Berg, Mr. Ludwig emphasized the importance of fathers as disciplinarians who can help stop bad behaviors and model good behaviors early in a child's life.

Responding to Representative Kulkarni, Mr. Ludwig highlighted the need for more resources for fathers, including legal resources and reintegration programs.

Representative Brown thanked Mr. Ludwig for his presentation and discussed various issues arising from or exacerbated by fatherlessness.

Co-Chair Jackson said he would like to see legislation to promote fatherhood engagement.

David Cozart, Founder and Chief Visionary Officer, Commonwealth Center for Fathers and Families (CCFF); Joel Griffith, CCFF Board of Directors; Ebony O'Rea, CCFF Senior Regional Engagement Officer (Louisville); and Tyler Barrett, CCFF Regional Engagement Agent (Eastern KY), discussed societal issues associated with father absence, and CCFF's mission and activities.

Mr. Cozart recommended educational programs to enhance couple relationships and father involvement with their children. He also highlighted CCFF's mission, which is to support fathers in providing child and family safety, economic stability, and overall community well-being through education, advocacy, and collaboration. He stated CCFF's 5 pillars are policy and advocacy, the KYDaD Academy, mini-grants of \$5,000 to \$10,000 to organizations for engaging fathers, training, and the fatherhood summit.

Ms. O'Rea, Mr. Griffith, and Mr. Barrett echoed the policy recommendations of CCFF and Mr. Cozart, and shared their personal stories of work in the areas of fatherhood and family engagement.

Co-Chair Jackson and Senator Herron thanked the presenters and emphasized the need for continued legislative work to promote fatherhood and family engagement.

Mr. Cozart noted that father absence and incarceration are closely linked, and efforts to decrease recidivism often also work to the benefit of fatherhood engagement.

Representative Brown said he hopes to see legislation emerge from the commission's discussion of fatherhood and family.

Chair Mays Bledsoe said she would like to see proposed legislation from the commission in the Families and Children Committee.

Adjournment

With no further business before the commission, the meeting was adjourned.