



Truth and Reconciliation Commission FINAL Minutes – Public Meeting #10 June 4, 2024

The meeting was started at 5:00 PM by Commissioner Mackin.

Attendance: Melody Mackin, Mia Schultz, Faith Yacubian, Michele Olvera, Adam Kersch and Ann Miller. **Members of the public included:** Rachel | רחל , Dan Coutu, Chief Brenda Gagne, Maria R. Pratt, Jean Hamilton, Gage Johnson (VTRC intern), and Krista Coombs.

Commissioner Mackin facilitated the meeting. Language and accessibility rules were explained; a message shared to please place your name in Chat if you are willing, but it is not necessary. Although there was no press in attendance, it was stated that if anyone from the press needs to be notified of our meetings in advance, please let us know so that we can make note. We ask that the public to please request access to any assistance needed in language translation or ASL via our email at least 72 hours in advance of any public meeting the VTRC holds.

Commissioner Schultz shared our land acknowledgement which is found here on our website: [Land Acknowledgement.pdf \(vermont.gov\)](#).

Staff introductions were made, starting with Commissioner Schultz, Adam Kersch, Ann Miller, Faith Yacubian, Michelle Olvera, Melody Mackin.

Commissioner Mackin reviewed the VTRC's working pledge which is posted here: [About Us | Vermont Truth and Reconciliation Commission](#). Also reviewed were the protocols of the open meeting.

May 7, 2024 meeting minutes were voted on as approved as final by Commissioners Mackin and Schultz.

Executive Director Yacubian reviewed the budget criteria: Material or purchase items for the Commission can be purchased or rented by the State of Vermont's Buildings and General Services or purchased from an external party, such as WB Mason.

- Purchases this month have included recording equipment for interviews
- Paying stipends to Education Series panelists
- Paying per diem stipends to Committee Members

- Paying ASL translation services for Ed Series
- VTRC Stationary

Executive Director Yacubian gave the VTRC Update:

- We are hiring and paying interns who are not receiving academic credit;
- We are learning the research database NVivo and beginning to code;
- We have held our second Ed Series Panel Session - People with Disabilities (our third session will be held on June 26th - Historical and Present-Day experiences of Black People in Vermont);
- We've held our first Committee meeting; the second meeting is June 11th at which time the Committee members will provide feedback on the Accessibility Checklist and Protocol for In-Person and Virtual Events;
- Attended local events and conferences, such as the Winooski Schools 2nd Annual "Unheard Stories" as well as an event and the Sanders Institute Gathering;
- Engaging with the community, such as presenting at S. Burlington Rotary
- Maintaining connections with Community-Partners, such as LAOB (Land Access Opportunity Board).

Old Business - Commissioner Mackin reviewed the Building and Planning Committee Meeting Update, next taking place virtually on Tuesday, June 11th at 3pm. Our first meeting was held in May with full Committee Members and the time was spent learning about each other and the process. We hope folks will be able to join us next week as we move forward.

Commissioner Schultz reviewed the Commissioner Deliberation with an update. Since our last meeting we have been doing a lot of outreach to the community and individuals. There has been minimal deliberation between the two Commissioners other than logistical items such as the outreach plan (Thursday May 23rd) and general goals and meeting with the VTRC Team (Thursday May 16th) to shore up our work. The concentration of the work right now is setting up outreach meetings, talking with folks in the community and with community organizations as well as state agencies to inform them of ways to get involved.

New Business - Commissioner Schultz shared the new VTRC website in some detail, highlighting the “How to Get Involved” access for members of the public or partners, Legislators, etc. Outreach is our main mission and we want people to be involved in the process. To view, please visit: [Home | Vermont Truth and Reconciliation Commission](#)
A view of one of the forms was shared on screen.

Commissioner Schultz then shared access to the Educational Series and how to join in as well as when each meeting will take place. A reminder that access to the videos will

always be placed on our website after the event takes place, should someone be unable to be there live.

The tab representing Research and all that the team has placed there for use by the public. Anyone wishing to look up their own family has a link to access.

Other items in the Research tab is a synopsis of our emblematic case meeting case meetings, research done by Champlain College students of problematic place names in Vermont. This project was a great way for students to get involved in our work and there is more work to be done still. If you know of anyone interested, please get in touch with the VTRC.

Lead Researcher Adam Kersch reviewed the process of researching records from the Weeks School, previously known as the Vermont Industrial School. Looking primarily at student records and solitary confinement, isolation logs and communication from the superintendents. When the VTRC learned about the State's desire to open another juvenile detention facility using the very same facility that had been closed, the Team collectively had concerns for those unaware. The Week School was a key player in the eugenics movement. The state sterilized roughly 36 inmates there without clear justification, not that it is ever justified. Several of the superintendents of the Weeks School were major proponents of eugenics, including the one the school was named for. The controversies around the Weeks School are not exclusively related to eugenics. The focus is also on the history of the institution, with major human rights concerns that consistently emerged of the past 100 years. It was not intended to be like a holistic history of the Week School. To see the Weeks School Statement: [Statement Regarding Opening of Vergennes Juvenile Detention Facility | Vermont Truth and Reconciliation Commission](#)

When you dive into the history of the week school, you find early on that there were various elected officials in Vermont who were speaking out against the institution. Governor Gates in 1917 noted that a lot of children were sent there just for being unhoused or poor. From the beginning, the people operating the institution weren't running in a manner that was consistent with the intended use of the institution.

All of this disproportionately affects folks of color, people with disabilities, LGBTQIA folks.

Other problems at the institution included overcrowding, use of severe corporal punishment and using long periods of solitary isolation as a routine punishment. During the 1930's and 40's, there are consistent reports that came to the legislature about abuses at these institutions. The legislature would respond by proposing minor fixes, for instance, asking that they not put children in solitary isolation for as long. The institutions did not follow those recommendations.

By 1944, there was a report that came out, noticing problems as well as staff using abusive language towards children, kicking and punching children. The legislature proposed changes such as limited solitary confinement, but by 1946, so just two years

after this one report came out, there was another report from Vermont Catholic Charities also noting physical abuse of children. Consistent attempts to reform the Weeks School were made to make it more humane. It was consistently unsuccessful and not totally confined to the first half of the 20th century. Reports in the 1970s caused controversy on how children were being treated. In 1979, the institution closed as a part of this nationwide push to deinstitutionalize. It's important to note that two years after Weeks School closed, the office of the governor warned people to not get nostalgic about having a locked juvenile detention facility because of this history of repeated abuses.

By 1986, the state reopened another facility, the Woodside Juvenile Rehabilitation Center in Essex. Unfortunately, this institution saw similar problems that the Weeks School had.

For anyone who isn't familiar with what happened at Woodside, we encourage you to search for a 2024 Seven Days article about Woodside with the warning that the contents of the article are very disturbing. Part of what we're trying to do is the VTRC is to get information out about the truth of these institutions and the things that have happened.

It's fairly accessible either searching online or going through the state archives, and the facts are that over the past 100 plus years, the state has had consistent problems making sure the children's rights are respected in juvenile detention facilities, and in many cases have traumatized and harmed the children. When the VTRC learned that the State wants to open another locked juvenile detention facility in the same facility as the Weeks School, we have serious concerns. How do we ensure that the fundamental rights and dignity of children are entrusted to the facility?

How do we ensure that those are safeguarded?

How can we pivot towards trauma-informed care and rehabilitation while moving away from punitive measures?

How can we make certain that the children relegated to this facility are not victims of the school to prison pipeline?

What's the accountability process to prevent something like this from happening again, and how is the humanity of all those that come through the doors going to be centered?

Commissioner Mackin opened the floor to the public and those that would like to speak. Because there has been trouble with the Teams program, the public was unable to join in audio or visual though there were no questions within the chat. We explained that we will be transitioning to Zoom meetings in the hopes of mitigating problems like these. Committee Member Dan Coutu expressed his thanks via the chat.

With no further questions or comments, Commissioner Mackin closed the meeting at 5:43 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
Ann Miller, Administrative Assist
Faith Yacubian, Executive Director

NEXT Public MEETING is SCHEDULED for Tuesday, June 11th – second Committee Member Session- also a public meeting.

NEXT regularly scheduled PUBLIC MEETING is TUESDAY, July 2, 2024