



Truth and Reconciliation Commission

FINAL Minutes – Committee Member Public Meeting #2

June 11, 2024

The meeting opened at 3:05 by Commissioner Mackin.

Attendance: Melody Mackin, Mia Schultz, Faith Yacubian and Ann Miller. **Committee Members of the public included:** Winnie Wilkinson, Mary Gerisch, Faye Longo, Dan Coutu, Lydia Diamond, Krista Coombs, Aurora Berger, Peg Powers, Chief Brenda Gagne, Matthew LeFluer and Sister Sankofa.

Commissioner Mackin facilitated the meeting. Accessibility statement was read by Commissioner Mackin. If 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 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. Captions are available when accessing this Teams meeting through the “more” option. Registration is required in order to access our public meetings, and we will be switching to the Zoom format next time we meet.

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

Working Pledge was shared by Commissioner Mackin, and it was shared on our shared screen as well: [Mission Statement and Pledge | Vermont Truth and Reconciliation Commission](#)

It was announced that it is not mandatory for all to participate in this next portion of the meeting, it is only if the Committee Members wanted to.

What does Vermont owe you an apology for? and
What does an apology look like for you?

Commissioner Mackin modeled this first item on our agenda:

In order to answer this question, opened up family's pedigree created by the state of Vermont in the 1920s, leading into eugenics and how people were targeted. Articulated what Vermont had to apologize for. Looking into the heart of darkness. Shared how family was treated through the generations. What they were called, what was done to them.

Many of these instances are not working and they are clearly harming people. We can do better. As long as it does not continue to happen, that's what I would like.

Commissioner Schultz modeled next: What does Vermont owe you an apology for? Although only an 8-year history in Vermont, Commissioner Schultz shared her advocacy for her children in the public schools, dismissal and silencing of their concerns and being undermined. As a Black woman advocating for Black children, concerns were not taken as seriously, which reflects a broader issue of racial bias and systemic racism within our educational system. Every child deserves equal attention and responsiveness from the school system, regardless of their race or background. Apology is a necessary step to acknowledging that there was harm.

What does an apology look like for Commissioner Schultz? Comprehensive aim at restoring trust and ensuring justice, centering impacted people and effective apology centers, listening and acknowledging concerns of a black woman with a commitment to believing and supporting parents. Concrete actions and reforms to prevent future occurrences. Not a one-time event but ongoing.

Matthew LeFluer discussed history and previous state of residence (Iowa) which had a very racial problem when growing up. Family had to leave or be vilified. Wants Vermont to apologize for its promoting white nationalism such as privilege and stop promoting the evil that promotes disparity, inequality and racism. Don't see me as an individual.

“What should Vermont do? Not repeat mistakes.

Faye Longo – Connections to Vermont for several generations. Doesn't want the children to have to struggle as much as she had to. An apology necessary for causing ancestors unsafe places to practice their ways. Schools and health care providers failed. For limiting family's ability to build generational wealth, and for the son and his misdiagnosis along with unsupportive school and health care providers. Unsure if the State of Vermont can make amends, but an apology would look like this not continuing for others in the future.

Mary Gerisch - Not originally from Vermont but have experiences with the police and with folks not understanding equity. For the children, Mary advocates in the school system.” An apology would look like - to be treated with dignity. For Vermont to have a declaration of human rights similar to the UN's Declaration of Human Rights and offer human rights courses the way European countries do.

Lydia Diamond - What I want Vermont to apologize for: Acknowledge the harm. Police treatment. Excited about the Truth and Reconciliation Committee because there's an opportunity to teach Vermont what they need to acknowledge. Hold business owners accountable. Every system has flaws. Wants respect.

Dan Coutu- Heritage is French Canadian with Abenaki and English, back 8 generations. Sense of community. Canadians were not welcomed here in the 1920's. Those policies and laws are forcing people to be individuals rather than in communities. Some folks can't make it on their own, even if a married couple, they still might need help.”

Margaret “Peg” Powers - Not a native Vermonter, extended family not economically on the same level in school they were treated differently. ADHD conditions - labeled. Are the schools

teaching empathy? Because I'm a business owner here in the state doesn't mean that I have privilege. My husband's family here for multiple generations, but no privilege.

Winnie Wilkinson: Spoke of landlord tenant laws in the State of Vermont. Not much has changed in landlord laws since 1978; crusading/lobbying for those laws to be revisited. This is what Vermont owes me as a human being. Vermont owes me the same privilege that every other human being in Vermont is entitled to as a basic human right. Also, revisit court cases, corrupt policing.

Sister Sankofa (aka Shanda Williams)- Vermont should apologize for the lies of ending slavery while it was continuing in the background. It's important that we look at those people who were enslaved. Vermont needs to apologize for the rapes, for the abuses as a slave master that the oppression, the bodies of enslaved peoples, whether indigenous or black or brown during those times with the outcomes of children who may have not been treated fairly or being then included in Vermont's history as valued persons.”

Chief Brenda Gagne Eugenics, racism and discrimination. Discussed burial grounds in Missisquoi and fighting the state for rights as they try to destroy the grounds. The State of Vermont needs to do better when it comes to our sacred burial grounds.

Faith Yacubian, Executive Director VTRC: Identities not specifically targeted in terms of Vermont Truth Commission mandate. Armenian American, privileged racially. Limited by communities able to cultivate or people/ relationships as a result of discrimination. What can they do? Legislators could have a reckoning where they name how they contributed to things. Perhaps engage in in a different manner.

Krista Coombs In terms of long COVID, which has increased their work within Vermont throughout the pandemic. Today, the definition for long COVID came out -using equity in the statement talking about long covid. What Vermont owes me an apology for is it's exceptionalism during the pandemic. As the mother of a child with long COVID. The Vermont Department of Health could put a comprehensive section on their new web page. Just basic places where people can go to get information necessary to learn how to get care for families who maybe have long COVID or other conditions from COVID.

Sister Sankofa asked about a deadline for Vermont making this apology.

Commissioner Schultz explained the Act 128 mandate, the new commissioner coming in, and the process for this Commission as we are in the Building and Planning right now. Our Commission expires in June, 2027. We have not yet started taking statements. Commissioner Schultz explained how we plan to take statements.

Ann Miller explained the logistics of meetings with the Committee Members and the VTRC Team. We will be switching to Zoom instead of Teams to see if that works better for all. Polls to vote on dates and time to follow. Not all meetings will be held on the same day of the month.

Reviewed general communication rules the VTRC Team tries to follow among us. Will send gentle reminders for information that we have not received back from you and sometimes messages go to spam. Please check your spam box if necessary.

If unable to join a scheduled meeting, please let the VTRC know by contacting me at ann.miller@vermont.gov, or you can call my phone if it's urgent.

If you have any concerns about our meetings, our protocols; something that someone says or does, please feel free to reach out to the Commissioners.

New VTRC trifold brochures: Anyone that would like some, please let us know. We can mail them out.

Executive Director Faith Yacubian went over the Accessibility Protocol in detail. Options of accessibility such as colors on the form or black and white print instead of colors for ease of reading were discussed. The Accessibility Protocol form will go back out to the Committee Members for a final review. The VTRC will look for any edits or suggestions from the Committee before June 28th so that edits can be considered before the next Public Meeting of July 2nd. The Protocol will be voted on then.

Commissioner Mackin opened the floor to the public and those that would like to speak. There were no others from the public.

With no further questions or comments, Commissioner Mackin closed the meeting at 4:56PM.

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

NEXT Public MEETING is SCHEDULED for Wednesday, June 26th - 3rd Educational Series - Black People in Vermont.

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