



**Meeting Minutes**  
**Indiana Commission on the Social Status of Black Males**  
**Government Center South**  
**Conference Room D**  
**302 W. Washington Street**  
**Indianapolis, IN 46204**  
**Wednesday, January 15, 2025**

**Call to Order:** A meeting of the Indiana Commission on the Social Status of Black Males (ICSSBM) was held on Wednesday, January 15, 2025, in person at the Government South Building Conference Room D, and virtually via Zoom for Government. The meeting was called to order at 10:38am.

**Roll Call - Commissioners in attendance:** Commissioner Vaneta Becker (Senator), Commissioner Damein Jones (Proxy FSSA), Commissioner (Chair) Kari Jones (Proxy Div. of Mental Health and Addiction), Commissioner (Vice Chair) Richard Okello (Proxy ICRC), Commissioner Kesha Rich (Proxy IDOA), Commissioner Dave Rozzell (arrived at 10:54am, Senator Bray), and Commissioner Tori Williams (Proxy Dept. of Correction).

**Via Conference:** Commissioner Kenneth Allen (Speaker Huston), Commissioner Elijah Neal (Senator Bray), and Commissioner Lamar Sykes (Speaker Huston).

**Commissioners absent:** Commissioner William Durham (Proxy Dept. of Education), Commissioner Larry Ervin (Proxy Dept. of Health), Commissioner Julie McGuire (State Representative), Commissioner Shanel Poole (Speaker Huston), Commissioner Dwayne Sawyer (Senator Bray), Commissioner Vernon Smith (State Representative), and Commissioner Greg Taylor (Senator).

**Others in attendance:** Alexis Gonzalez, Director, Indiana Commission on Hispanic/Latino Affairs, LeVelle Harris, Strategic Practice Director, Indiana Department of Child Services, Jordan Teske-Harrison, Director, Indiana Commission for Women, Gabriel Kramer, Cultural Commissioner Coordinator, Indiana Civil Rights Commission (ICRC), Katy Merrel, Interim Deputy Director of Programming, Indiana Civil Rights Commission (ICRC), and Nicole Owens, Director, Indiana Native American Indian Affairs Commission.

Chair Jones established a quorum at 10:38am.

**Chair's Report:** Chair Kari Jones provided the Commission with a reminder regarding the process of the Per Diem program.

**Approval of Meeting Minutes:** Vice Chair Richard Okello moved forward with the adoption of the minutes from October 16, 2024, November 13, 2024, and December 11, 2024, meetings. Commissioner Tori Williams moved to approve the meeting minutes. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Vaneta Becker. The rollcall vote was as follows: Commissioner Kenneth

Allen (Y), Commissioner Vaneta Becker (Y), Commissioner Damein Jones (Y), Commissioner (Chair) Kari Jones (Y), Commissioner Elijah Neal (Y), Commissioner (Vice-Chair) Richard Okello (Y), Commissioner Kesha Rich (Y), Commissioner Lamar Sykes (Y) and Commissioner Tori Williams (Y). The motion passed unanimously.

**Review and Approval of the Financial Report:** Vice Chair Richard Okello called for a motion to approve the financial reports for October 2024, November 2024, and December 2024. Commissioner Vaneta Becker moved to approve the financial reports as presented. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Damein Jones. The rollcall vote was as follows: Commissioner Kenneth Allen (Y), Commissioner Vaneta Becker (Y), Commissioner Damein Jones (Y), Commissioner (Chair) Kari Jones (Y), Commissioner Elijah Neal (Y), Commissioner (Vice-Chair) Richard Okello (Y), Commissioner Kesha Rich (Y), Commissioner Lamar Sykes (Y) and Commissioner Tori Williams (Y). The motion passed unanimously.

**Officer Elections:** The ICSSBM held elections to vote for a new chairperson and vice-chairperson for 2025. Chair Kari Jones nominated Commissioner Richard Okello to serve as Chair of the Commission. Commissioner Richard Okello accepted the nomination. There were no additional nominations. Chair Kari Jones moved to elect Commissioner Richard Okello as the new ICSSBM Chair. Commissioner Tori Williams moved to approve the motion, and it was seconded by Commissioner Vaneta Becker. The rollcall vote was as follows: Commissioner Kenneth Allen (Y), Commissioner Vaneta Becker (Y), Commissioner Damein Jones (Y), Commissioner (Chair) Kari Jones (Y), Commissioner Elijah Neal (Y), Commissioner (Vice-Chair) Richard Okello (Y), Commissioner Kesha Rich (Y), Commissioner Lamar Sykes (Y) and Commissioner Tori Williams (Y). The motion passed unanimously.

Commissioner Richard Okello nominated Commissioner Tori Williams to serve as Vice-Chair of the Commission. Commissioner Tori Williams accepted the nomination. There were no other nominations for Vice-Chair. Commissioner Vaneta Becker moved to approve the nomination of Commissioner Tori Williams. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Kesha Rich. The rollcall vote was as follows: Commissioner Kenneth Allen (Y), Commissioner Vaneta Becker (Y), Commissioner Damein Jones (Y), Commissioner (Chair) Kari Jones (Y), Commissioner Elijah Neal (Y), Commissioner (Vice-Chair) Richard Okello (Y), Commissioner Kesha Rich (Y), Commissioner Lamar Sykes (Y) and Commissioner Tori Williams (Y). The motion passed unanimously.

**Subcommittee and Workgroup Reports:** Subcommittee Chair Richard Okello informed the Commission that the grant recipients had been notified of their allocations for this year and are working with Director Virgil Giles on the disbursement process. Director Giles also stated that Perseverance Partners, LLC - Baby Blueprint declined the \$690 grant award. Director Giles confirmed that he accepted Perseverance Partners' email, formally declining the award. After Chair Richard Okello's grant program update, Commissioner Dave Rozzell inquired about what would happen to the \$690. Chair Richard Okello responded that the funds would be returned to the general fund.

Director Virgil Giles then provided an update on the Indiana Black Barbershop Health Initiative (IBBHI). He informed the Commission that seventeen community partners have confirmed they will host free health screening events in April 2025. Additionally, he mentioned that he has been on the radio with Esther Lewis, CEO/Founder of Holistic Evolution, promoting the IBBHI. Director Giles also shared that community leaders from both Lake and Marion Counties will be involved in the initiative for the first time since the pandemic. There were no questions following Director Giles' update.

**Director's Report:** Director Virgil Giles announced that the next ICSSBM meeting will be held on Wednesday, March 19, 2025. During that meeting, ICRC Leadership will be present to give presentations on Policies and Statutes, Ethics, and Finance. In addition, at the next meeting, the Commissioners will review and provide input on the Commission bylaws. Director Giles also suggested that the Commissioners review the updated ICSSBM website. Director Giles concluded his report by informing the

Commissioners that he would be on Harambe Radio – Operation Breadbasket on Saturday, January 18, and encouraged them to listen to the show if they were available. Following Director Giles' report, Commissioner Dave Rozzell asked about the status of the ICSSBM annual report. Director Giles responded that the report had been completed but had not yet been approved by the state. He added that he would share it with the Commission once it was approved and ready to be posted on the website. There were no further questions following Director Giles' report.

**Unfinished Business:** There was no unfinished business discussed.

**New Business:** Commissioner Dave Rozzell asked if the Commission had taken a stance on HB 1136 (Education). Chair Kari Jones responded that the Commission had not taken a position on the bill. Commissioner Rozzell asked if the elected officials on the Commission could provide an update on HB 1136. Commissioner Vaneta Becker responded that she is in the Senate and that HB 1136 was a house bill. She further stated that, personally, she is not in favor of the bill and will not support it, as she believes in public education.

Commissioner Dave Rozzell expressed concerns regarding HB 1136. Commissioner Richard Okello then asked Commissioner Kenneth Allen if the Commission had worked with legislators in the past during legislative sessions to gather more information about a bill or to advocate for a different position. Commissioner Kenneth Allen responded by stating that the Commission had historically worked with both legislative bodies to advocate for issues highlighted in the annual report or those deemed important for the demographic the Commission serves.

**Announcement for the Good of the Order:** Commissioner Dave Rozzell updated Commission members on his involvement with the Indianapolis Coalition on Educational Equity.

Commissioner Elijah Neal asked about when the Per Diem rate changed from \$50.00 to \$35.00. This sparked a general discussion among Commission members and Alexis Gonzalez, Director of the Indiana Commission on Hispanic/Latino Affairs. Commissioner Richard Okello suggested that Erik England, Chief Financial Officer of the Indiana Civil Rights Commission (ICRC), address the Commission's concerns about the Per Diem reduction during his presentation at the March 19 meeting.

Director Virgil Giles reminded the Commission that the ICRC will be hosting its annual Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday Celebration, which will begin on Thursday, January 16, at 6:00 p.m. with a wreath-laying ceremony at the Indiana War Memorial: Soldiers and Sailors Monument, followed by a commemorative light show. The celebration will continue the next day, Friday, January 17, at 12:00 p.m. with a ceremony and award celebration at the Indiana Statehouse.

Commissioner Richard Okello thanked Chair Kari Jones for her leadership over the past two years. Commissioner Dave Rozzell expressed agreement with Commissioner Okello's sentiments.

There being no further business, the January 2025, ICSSBM Commission meeting concluded at 11:26am.