
NC Martin Luther King Jr. Commission

2023 Annual Report





Roy Cooper
Governor

Pamela B. Cashwell
Secretary

My fellow North Carolinians,

As we celebrate the 30th anniversary of the North Carolina Martin Luther King Jr. Commission, we honor and acknowledge the decades of work and dedication from both previous and current Commission members. With a consistent focus on the values most important to Dr. King, the MLK Jr. Commission has always strived to lead the state's efforts in ensuring peace, justice, and equity in our communities. I am excited to continue working with my fellow members to educate, advocate, support, and uplift North Carolina's underserved and underrepresented populations each year as we prioritize various projects and events.

We hope to continue building a network of collaborators, partners, and passionate leaders who commit to uplifting and carrying the work of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. We look forward to more opportunities to partner with state government agencies as they align to our charge and mission. I hope to see the MLK Jr. Commission bridge necessary connections between North Carolinians and their government to foster better relationships and build the future our Commission sees for this great state.

From previous Commission members to current ones, there is a connecting thread of passion for a just and equitable society created through the efforts started by Dr. King. I am excited to continue learning and advocating on behalf of the people of North Carolina.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rodney E. Harris". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Dr. Rodney E. Harris
Chair

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2023 Annual Commission Summary

Created in 1993 pursuant to [G.S. §143B-426.34A¹](#) and [G.S. §143B-426.34B²](#), the NC Martin Luther King Jr. Commission is directed to (i) encourage appropriate ceremonies and activities throughout the state relating to the observance of the legal holiday honoring Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday; (ii) provide advice and assistance to local governments and private organizations across the state with respect to the observance of such holidays; and (iii) promote among the people of North Carolina an awareness and appreciation of the life and work of Martin Luther King Jr.

After numerous conversations on the potential benefits of strategic planning efforts, the Commission began discussing the possibility of facilitated strategic planning opportunities with the NC Office of State Budget and Management. Seeking to establish a clear foundation for the Commission by creating updated mission and vision statements along with identifying clear Commission values, members dove in with the full support of the DOA staff. The new mission and vision statements and the values identified by Commission members are included below. With new and continuing members, the Commission has collaboratively built upon its existing foundation and will continue working on strategic planning efforts related to goal setting for 2024.

Although not required by NC General Statute or Executive Order, this report provides an overview and review of the focus areas, projects, and ongoing work of the NC Martin Luther King Jr. Commission throughout 2023.

¹ https://www.ncleg.gov/EnactedLegislation/Statutes/PDF/BySection/Chapter_143B/GS_143B-426.34A.pdf

² https://www.ncleg.gov/EnactedLegislation/Statutes/PDF/BySection/Chapter_143B/GS_143B-426.34B.pdf

NC Martin Luther King Jr. Commission

Members

Chair:

Dr. Rodney E. Harris

Members:

Dr. Allison Mathews
Catherine Williamson-Hardy *
Demetrius R. Deloatch
Jamilla T. Hawkins
Jennifer Nehlsen *
Kenneth Raymond *
Laureen G. Jones *
Rabbi Lucy H. F. Dinner
Rebecca Trammel
Rev. Dr. Roosevelt McPherson *
Dr. Stan K. Holt
Dr. Tiffany Tuma *
Walter Rogers
Rev. Dr. Warren L. Herndon *
Verlina P. Lomick

Former Members:

Nervahna Crew
Carolyn Stroud
Howard Morgan
Kiana Rivers
Paul Robinson
James E. Williams Jr.
Edwin Booth

* Indicates a new member as of July 2023.

Overview of Meetings

January 4, 2023

The Commission met virtually to discuss the *Letter from Birmingham Jail* project plans and updates on the Livin' the Dream grant process. DOA staff shared information about MLK Day of Service volunteer opportunities and asked the Commissioners about other opportunities.

January 25, 2023

The Commission met virtually to further discuss the *Letter from Birmingham Jail* project while the Grants Committee shared updates on the forthcoming grant scoring process. The group began discussing the idea of seeking facilitators for a strategic planning retreat session.

February 22, 2023

The Commission met virtually to hear updates on the notification process for grant award recipients and how DOA will work to assist in those communications and public promotion of the awards. Further, the *Letter from Birmingham Jail* project committee provided updates on the project planning and worked with members to continue ironing out details.

March 16, 2023 (*Special Meeting*)

The Commission's chair called a special meeting for the purpose of a formal vote to approve the *Livin' the Dream* grant award recipients and the proposed amounts of each award. The Commission voted to approve 12 grant recipients for awards totaling \$45,000.00.

March 29, 2023

The Commission met virtually to finalize steps to complete the 2022-2023 grant cycle and discuss the potential of having a consultant help with administrative tasks for the project. The *Letter from Birmingham Jail* project committee again gave a progress update and members discussed providing the event's speakers with honorariums for their time and participation.

April 26, 2023

The Commission met virtually to learn about the best ways to promote the upcoming *Letter from Birmingham Jail* panel discussion. The group also heard from DOA staff about the progress of creating the *Livin' the Dream* grant contracts and then discussed the idea of a reception for grant recipients.

May 24, 2023

The Commission met virtually to further discuss with DOA staff the opportunity to have a facilitated strategic planning session and to receive budget updates. Further, DOA staff shared information from the Office of the Governor on the Public Education State of Emergency and encouraged members to contact their legislators and educate themselves on the current issues.

June 28, 2023

The Commission met virtually to review their mission and purpose with updates on a separate conversation held with the Governor's education team about the Public Education State of Emergency. The group also briefly discussed new project ideas.

August 25, 2023 - Strategic Planning Session

The Commission met in person at the Administration Building in downtown Raleigh to participate in a facilitated strategic planning session with assistance from the Office of State Budget & Management. The group learned about mission and vision statements along with the importance of values then completed several workshop activities in smaller groups. The Commission left this session with drafted language for both a mission and vision statement along with a handful of priority values to further discuss and vote on.

August 30, 2023

The Commission met virtually to further edit the drafted mission and vision statements written during the previous strategic planning session. The group also discussed the potential plan of action for the Commission's response to the public education crisis at hand. Lastly, DOA staff shared the idea of creating an annual report for the Commission and briefly discussed what it would entail.

September 27, 2023

The Commission met virtually to finalize the drafted mission and vision statements after further editing. The group also continued to discuss the opportunity to publish an annual Commission report and the potential committees they may want to create. Lastly, members voted to create a committee to meet and draft language for communications related to the public education crisis.

October 25, 2023

The Commission met virtually to formally vote on their new mission and vision statements and to review drafted resolution language from the Public Education Committee for approval. Those Commission members who were present voted to approve the resolution language with a few changes. Lastly, DOA staff shared an example report from another Task Force and explained the general structure of the annual report then shared a draft for their review.

November 29, 2023

The Commission met virtually to hear from the MLK Events Planning Committee on ideas for the January MLK Day of Service. A collection project of warm-weather items was discussed to support a variety of shelters in the surrounding Wake County area(s). Further, the Commission briefly discussed the budget status for the 2023-2024 Fiscal Year. The group also heard from DOA staff about the status of the Commission's first draft report. The Commission planned to reconvene in January.

Commission Projects & Events

Livin' the Dream Grant Cycle (2022-2023)

The NC Martin Luther King Jr. Commission continuously seeks to support an increase in the capacity and impact of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) led and/or grassroots organizations in North Carolina working to advance the vision of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. The Commission designated a handful of members to lead this initiative through a grants committee who worked closely with DOA staff to complete this grant cycle successfully. After receiving and reviewing 42 applications from a variety of organizations across North Carolina, the grants committee reviewed each application and recommended 12 groups for awards. The Commission approved a total of \$45,000 to be dispersed to the 12 organizations. The 2022-2023 *Livin' the Dream* project grant recipients included:

Black Indians NC - Durham County

Charles Hamilton Houston Foundation - Durham County

CONNECT Community Inc. - Robeson County

Democracy Green - Wake County

ENC Nonprofit Partners - Pitt County

NC Community of Coalitions - Wake County

New Beginnings Victory Center - Craven County

Partners in Community - Brunswick County

Project Point Five - Lee County

St. Paul Presbyterian Church - Franklin County

Train Them Up for Success - Wake County

Tyrell County Community Development Corporation - Tyrell County

Providing support to community organizations remains a priority for the Commission. The Martin Luther King Jr. Commission hopes to continue supporting and connecting with BIPOC-ed and grassroots organizations throughout North Carolina through grant funding opportunities.

Letter from Birmingham City Jail 60th Anniversary Panel Discussion

In honor of the 60th anniversary of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s [Letter from Birmingham Jail](#)³, the Martin Luther King Jr. Commission felt it was important to host an event near April 16, 2023 on the lessons, relevancy, and the call-to-action of this letter. Dr. King was arrested and jailed in Birmingham, Alabama for participating in anti-segregation protests. During that time, he wrote his now famous letter to respond to criticisms he received from several religious leaders. The Commission recognized the present sense of urgency to eliminate racial inequities and the correlations to the inequities Dr. King was working to address in 1963.

On Monday May 1, 2023, the Martin Luther King Jr. Commission hosted a public, virtual webinar with an esteemed panel of experts from a variety of backgrounds. The panel was moderated by [April Dawson](#)⁴ who serves as the Associate Dean of Technology & Innovation & Professor of Law at NCCU. Panel members included:

- [Dr. Rodney S. Sadler Jr.](#)⁵ - Associate Professor of Bible & Director of the Center for Social Justice and Reconciliation
- [Dr. LeRhonda Manigault-Bryant](#)⁶ - Professor & Director of the Sonja Haynes Stone Center for Black History and Culture
- [Dr. Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove](#)⁷ - Spiritual Writer & Preacher & Community Cultivator
- [Greear A. Webb](#)⁸ - J.D. Candidate at Emory University School of Law

The event moderator and panelists provided background context on the circumstances of Dr. King's letter and discussed issues like nonviolent resistance, lessons from Dr. King, social justice, modern racial issues, allyship, and the impact of Dr. King's writing style. The Martin Luther King Jr. Commission will continue to prioritize important events related to the work of Dr. King and will continue to support educational opportunities and discussions.



³ https://www.csuchico.edu/iege/_assets/documents/susi-letter-from-birmingham-jail.pdf

⁴ <https://law.nccu.edu/school-of-law-directory/april-g-dawson/>

⁵ <https://www.upsem.edu/about/faculty/rodney-s-sadler-jr/>

⁶ <https://aaad.unc.edu/faculty-staff/lerhonda-manigault-bryant/>

⁷ <https://jonathanwilsonhartgrove.com/bio>

⁸ <https://www.linkedin.com/in/greearwebb/>

Facilitated Strategic Planning Session

After numerous conversations amongst themselves about the idea of strategic planning, NC Martin Luther King Jr. Commission members collaborated with DOA staff and determined the Commission lacked a clear mission, vision, and values. DOA staff connected the Commission with the Office of State Budget & Management (OSBM), who helped facilitate necessary discussions and exercises to cultivate new mission and vision statements and identify relevant values.

On August 25, 2023, Commission members gathered in Raleigh for an in-person facilitated strategic planning workshop guided by OSBM. Over the span of four hours, members completed a variety of small-group and individual exercises. Specifically, OSBM facilitated:

1. An introduction to missions, visions, and values with clear definitions, qualities, and examples;
2. An active review of the existing mission statement as related to governing statutes;
3. Drafting a new mission statement;
4. An active review of the existing vision statement;
5. Drafting a new vision statement; and
6. An informative review and voting exercise on new Commission values.



Commission members discussed and edited the draft mission and vision statements during successive monthly meetings. In October, a majority quorum voted to finalize both the new mission and vision statements.

Mission:

The NC MLK Jr. Commission embodies the values of Dr. Martin Luther King by acting urgently to reduce inequity, drive comprehensive justice-centered change for all North Carolinians by amplifying the efforts of organizations championing humanity and supporting celebratory events in honor of Dr. King's birthday.

Vision:

The NC MLK Jr. Commission envisions a North Carolina in which diversity is celebrated, all people are respected, the systems of our society perpetuate justice and equity, and “we must come to see that the end we seek is a society at peace with itself, a society that can live with its conscience” (MLK Jr. 1965) now and for generations to come.

Values:

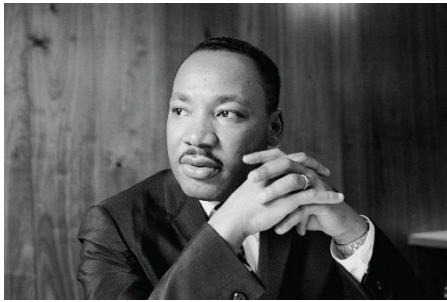
Transformation Accountability Respect Equity Service

With a clearer direction for the Commission, members are empowered and prepared to continue striving to achieve all they are charged with accomplishing. Discussions about potential next steps in the strategic planning process will continue as members determine if facilitated goal setting is the next best step for the Commission. If members decide they would like assistance in goal setting as well, DOA staff can again collaborate with the Office of State Budget & Management as potential facilitators. For now, the Commission is preparing for their work in 2024 with a more defined direction and unified group.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s Influence

"Life's most persistent and urgent question is, 'What are you doing for others?'"

–Dr. King Jr. (1957)



The NC Martin Luther King Jr. Commission is named in honor of the late Baptist minister, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., a social activist who led the civil rights movement in the United States. Following his premature death, Dr. King Jr. remained the most impactful and well-known African American leader of his era, which was confirmed by the establishment of a national holiday in his honor. Like the impact felt throughout the United States, North Carolina

continues to promote the importance of understanding, appreciating, and continuing the work of Dr. King Jr. when it comes to civil equity in our state.

In 1993, the NC Martin Luther King Jr. Commission was created after the Human Relations Commission of the NC Department of Administration passed the establishing legislation. To honor the birthday of Dr. King Jr., the NC MLK Jr. Commission was made to partner in spearheading the statewide celebration of the January 15th national holiday. However, it is important to remember that the legacy and influence of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. does not dissipate after this holiday. Throughout each year, the NC MLK Jr. Commission works intentionally to embody the ideals of Dr. King Jr. by advocating for an equitable and just North Carolina through inclusive discussions, diverse partnerships, and widespread education.

END OF REPORT