6\_2\_2023 June meeting minutes of the Kansas African American Affairs Commission

Chairman Mark McCormick called the meeting to order at 1:32 pm

Commissioners present: Davis, McCormick, New, Penn, Westbrook

Commissioners absent: Lewis, McRoy

Chairman McCormick’s opening remarks referenced the beginning of his tenure as the Executive Director of The Kansas African American Museum in Wichita. He recalled the number of people who had complaints about how he directed the museum. He stressed that for this current organization, Commissioners will need to decide the degree to which they, as individuals, are committed to the organization and how they will respond to the gathering group of critics pulling in different directions.

Executive Director Knoell informed the Commission that the limited scope (100-hour) Legislative Post Audit had begun. The audit will run for approximately 2.5 weeks, the first week focused on gathering information and the second week on compiling and writing the audit report. Commissioners should expect to be contacted by the office of the LPA soon. It is unclear what Commissioners will be asked or whether those answers will be considered confidential. Once the audit is complete, Director Knoell will have an opportunity to respond to the report but then everything will be held in confidence by the LPA until their fall report in committee. It is estimated that will be in August or September.

The audit is limited in scope and will focus on financial reporting and whether or not the Commission is in compliance with the governing statute. The discussion of the audit focused on what the Commissioners can expect. Unfortunately, at the meeting time, that was unknown. Other discussions highlighted that transparency was never a bad thing and it can even be a good thing to find areas of improvement for the Commission moving forward.

There was a brief discussion of expectations for the Commissioner’s activities, whether planning/attending town halls, doing reports, or sharing social media posts. The discussion ended with the Commission asking the Executive Director to provide a template for reporting individual activities, a list of any Juneteenth activities around the state, and if she will be in any given area to let the local Commissioner know so they can attend if their schedule allows.

Commissioner McCormick raised the national conversation in South Carolina about a potential change of the plaintiff’s name in the Brown v. Board of Topeka court case. The argument to do so proposes the Virginia plaintiffs as lead names. Commissioner McCormick explained that Brown was chosen because of its place alphabetically, but also to bring attention to the fact that discrimination existed outside of the deep south.

Commissioner New offered that she had already been in contact with Cheryl Brown Henderson about the issue. This is not the first time that people from South Carolina have proposed a name change for the case. The Commission decided while an opinion piece from Ms. Henderson may carry weight, perhaps this Commission did not need to weigh in at this time.

In reference to opinion pieces or letters to the editor, Commissioner Davis wondered whether the Chair needed to review them ahead of time, especially if they were going to write something potentially controversial. Both Chairman McCormick and Director Knoell stressed that neither of them has editorial or veto control over what any given Commissioner chooses to say publicly. As an employee of the Governor’s Office, that office does have a say in what Director Knoell states publicly, but the Commissioners are not under that same restriction. As the Director likes to say, “Y’all grown.”

Commissioner Davis raised the question of the difference between voicing opinions individually and acting as a group. Should this Commission move toward a group mission? Chairman McCormick remarked that this brings us back to the original question of statute interpretation as to how the Commission functions. The statute indicates that the lion’s share should be carried by the Commission but there is enough vagueness in the statute that it is unclear. Ultimately, Chairman McCormick is not comfortable telling other Commissioners what they could or could not say.

1. Announcements
   1. Topeka Unity Walk, Monday, June 5, 11 am, Kansas Statehouse
   2. Topeka Juneteenth Parade, Saturday, June 10, 10 am, downtown Topeka
   3. Black Mastermind Group Juneteenth Business Expo, Friday, June 16th, downtown Kansas City, Kansas
   4. Advocacy and Awareness Group of Johnson County, Juneteenth rally, Saturday, June 17th, 10 am, Thompson Park, Overland Park, Kansas
   5. Salina Town Hall, Saturday, June 24th, 10 am-noon, St. John’s Baptist Church
   6. Topeka Town Hall, Saturday, August 12th, 10 am-noon, Brown V. Board site
   7. Black Women Get Fit, Wichita, August 19th, WSU (Topeka event postponed due to scheduling conflict)
   8. Next meeting: July 7, 2023, scheduled in person.

Commissioner Davis moved and Commissioner Westbrook seconded the motion to adjourn. Adjourned at 2:26 pm.