



Governor's Commission on Caribbean Affairs
Strategic Planning Session (SPS-I) Meeting

Virtual ZOOM
Thursday, May 29, 2025
6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.

Meeting Minutes

Commissioners in Attendance:

Dr. Melissa Buckley, Member
Gabriel Christian, Member
Samantha Howard, Member
Luis McSween, Member
Habacuc Petion, Member
Dr. Carla Sewer, Member
Elaine Simon, Member
Kassandra Tucker, Member
Ambassador Curtis Ward, Chair

Commissioners Absent:

Guests: Amy Lo, Antoine Amb Denis, Christopher Benjamin, Shoron Boilers, Kathleen Bravo, O'Henry Bryan, Franklin Burke, Dane Clarke, Derrice D., Sandra Daly, Donald Davis, Jefferine Douglas, Auriol Europ Greene, Josanne Francis, Lari Fraser, Clayon Gayle, Michelle Godfrey, Laura Hill, Ken Irish-Bramble, Marci Isaacs, Andrea James, Cheryl Lammy, Doreen Christian LaRoche, Cheryl March, Vonetta Martin, John McKenzie, Dr. Aurora McKenzie, Althea McKenzie, Valda Morris, Phelecia Nembhard, Aubry Padmore, Alison Panton, Rolando Robinson, Derrick Rose, Lisda Sawmeu. Derel Stephenson, Moye Stephenson, Sirina Sucklal, Calvin Townsend, Nandi Walcott, Eric Walcott, Kadi-Ann White, Lyne Williams

GOCI Staff: Silvia Gomez Decja, Administrative Director - Governor's Commission on Hispanic Affairs (GOCI)
Lawrence Walker, Executive Director - GOCI
Gregory Yancey, Chief of Staff – GOCI
Keith Colston, Director of the Ethnic Commissions - GOCI
Cheryl Madigan, Executive Assistant - GOCI

I. Call to Order:

Ambassador Curtis Ward, Chair – Meeting called to order at 6:10 p.m.

II. Opening Remarks:

- ❖ Chair Curtis Ward welcomed everyone. He informed everyone that the commission is aware of the Governor's priorities. He stated that the commission is expanding from 9 to 15 members pursuant to the Executive Order. He asked that all commissioners attend the meetings with their videos on.
- ❖ Executive Director Larry Walker thanked the commissioners for their service and continuous service. He mentioned the new Executive Order in which he spoke about the increase in members for the commission. He stated that Commissioner Luis McSween will become the vice chair of the commission. He asked if any commissioner is unable to dedicate their time to the commission, please let him, Chair Ward or any of



GOCI's staff. He too went over having the commissioners have their cameras on during public meetings. Please let the chair and administrative director know if you are unable to attend a meeting. Commissioners will be given proper notification of meetings. Commissioners are to let the administrative director know of all activities they attend. This will help GOCI process their MFR (Managing for Results) report and the commission's Annual report. If commissioners are attending an event, they are to complete an Event Request form. He brought up June as National Caribbean Heritage Month and August is Maryland Caribbean Heritage Month. They are planning events for the month of August.

- ❖ Administrative Director Silvia Gomez Decja introduced herself. She is from Mexico. She is here to help the commission and the community.

III. **Roll Call:**

Executive Assistance Cheryl Madigan provided the roll call.

IV. **Opening Remarks (cont.)**

Chief of Staff Greg Yancey spoke of Commissioner Petion, who was busy today setting up a medical clinic and working a food drive and might not be able to attend tonight's meeting, but he has some ideas on a Caribbean Heritage Month celebration event for 2026 on the Eastern Shore. He asked that the commission work on the bylaws. He went over the State Department of Education meeting. There will be various town halls involving local education agencies and directors, community leaders about our school system, and how our school system is adjusting to some of the new executive orders on issues, whether it's DEAI+, Immigrant Affairs. Or LGBTQIA+. Please submit any proposals for legislation to Mr. Yancey in June by July.

V. **Administrative Report:**

Director Keith Colston has provided six reports, attended seventeen meetings, and four conference calls. [Maryland 250](#) has grants that the commission can apply for. The commission can submit stories and interviews to them for the Maryland 250 celebration in 2026. He would like everyone to visit the [governor.maryland.gov website](https://governor.maryland.gov). It lists the governor's 10 top priorities that GOCI concentrates on.

VI. **Committees:**

Chair Ward would like these committees not to be called sub committees. He informed everyone that the public can serve as a member on one of these committees.

- ❖ **Health** – Commissioner Melissa Buckley reported that Delegate Regina Boyce, State of Environment and Transportation Committee has an event coming up celebrating National Caribbean Heritage month and how the Commission can engage with the work of her committee. This would intersect with health and social determinants of health.
- ❖ **Business/Economic Development** – Commissioner Kassandra Tucker had no report for tonight. She will reconnect with the rest of the members before the next meeting to define the next steps and priorities, explore potential stakeholder partnerships for business engagement, and consult with Chair Ward for additional guidance and support.
- ❖ **Education (Workforce Development)** – Commissioner Gabriel Christian submitted a report. We spoke about the urgent need to foster pathways into aviation and aerospace careers for Maryland's youth through collaboration with the East Coast Chapter of Tuskegee Airmen Inc. The committee partnered with the University of Maryland Caribbean Students Association and Rebuild Dominica Inc. in 2024. They are working with DuVal High School to develop an aviation-themed marching band. Commissioner Carla Sewer asked about why University of Maryland College Park has a Caribbean student group, but the University of Maryland Eastern Shore doesn't. Commissioner Christian provided her the following information and contact. Thelma B. Thompson, President, UMES <https://www.wcp.umes.edu/pr/this-umes-car-uses-no-petrol/>.



- ❖ **Community (Arts/Culture/Interfaith)** – Vice Chair Luis McSween attended one event at the University of Maryland. He mentioned that everyone needs to get started on the planning of Caribbean Heritage Month. Commissioner Samantha Howard will be assisting Vice Chair McSween. Commissioner Habacuc Petion was grateful that COS Greg Yancey was able to attend the food drive today. He spoke about a non-profit and Radio Oasis station. Chair Ward requests a short brief about what might be needed.

VII. Old Business

Commissioner Elaine Simon was unable to communicate at the meeting to discuss the Carnival/Caribbean Festival or the Library event.

VII. New Business

It was discussed previously that the commission will need to work on the new bylaws for the commission. It was mentioned previously that Vice Chair McSween and Commissioner Howard will be working on the Caribbean Heritage Month celebration. Chair Ward stated that he would prefer to have the celebration at the Government House. Vice Chair McSween suggested that they collaborate with events that are currently happening, and Chair Ward encourages all commissioners to attend these events. Please email AD Silvia Decja any events that are happening.

VII. Public Announcements

June 10th – Declaration by the Montgomery County City Council
June 29th – Interfaith Service at the People's Congregational Church in DC
Commissioner Howard asked for a master calendar for events.
Commissioner Christian requested a commission letterhead.

VIII. Motions: Adjourning of the Meeting:

Motion	1st	2nd	Vote
Adjournment of meeting at 7:45 p.m.	VC Luis McSween	Dr. Carla Sewer	8Y-0N-0A