
Committee Meeting

of

JOINT COMMITTEE ON THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

“The Committee will be meeting to discuss the implementation of the Amistad Curriculum”

LOCATION: Remote Meeting Via Zoom

DATE: June 17, 2021
10:00 a.m.

MEMBERS OF COMMITTEE PRESENT:

Senator Ronald L. Rice, Co-Chair
Assemblywoman Mila M. Jasey, Co-Chair
Senator James Beach
Senator Joseph P. Cryan
Senator Michael L. Testa
Assemblywoman Verlina Reynolds-Jackson
Assemblywoman Shavonda E. Sumter
Assemblyman Benjie E. Wimberly
Assemblywoman BettyLou DeCroce
Assemblywoman Serena DiMaso
Assemblyman Erik K. Simonsen



ALSO PRESENT:

Rebecca Sapp
Executive Director

Ivy Pomper
Executive Assistant

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Meeting Recorded and Transcribed by
The Office of Legislative Services, Public Information Office,
Hearing Unit, State House Annex, PO 068, Trenton, New Jersey

SENATE

Hon. James Beach
Hon. Joseph P. Cryan
Hon. Declan J. O'Scanlon, Jr.
Hon. Ronald L. Rice
Hon. Michael L. Testa
Hon. Samuel D. Thompson

ASSEMBLY

Hon. Ralph R. Caputo
Hon. BettyLou DeCroce
Hon. Serena DiMaso
Hon. Mila M. Jasey
Hon. Verlina Reynolds-Jackson
Hon. Erik K. Simonsen
Hon. Benjie E. Wimberly



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MEETING NOTICE

TO: Members of the Joint Committee on the Public Schools

**FROM: Senator Ronald Rice, Co-Chair
Assemblywoman Mila Jasey, Co-Chair**

The Joint Committee on the Public Schools will meet on Thursday, June 17, 2021, at 10:00 a.m., via Zoom, to receive testimony from invited guests on the implementation of the Amistad Curriculum.

The public may address comments and questions to Rebecca Sapp, Executive Director, at 609-847-3365, or by email at Rsapp@njleg.org

Issued June 7, 2021

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | <u>Page</u> |
|---|-------------|
| Stephanie James Harris, Ph.D. Executive Director New Jersey Amistad Commission, and Professor of African American Studies Richard Stockton College Rowan College | 4 |
| Jeffrey Jones Commissioner New Jersey Amistad Commission | 9 |
| Assemblyman William Payne Commissioner New Jersey Amistad Commission, and Sponser Amistad Legislation | 16 |
| Andrea Roseborough Commissioner New Jersey Amistad Commission | 19 |
| Marie Blistan President New Jersey Education Association (NJEA) | 20 |
| Steve Beatty Secretary-Treasurer New Jersey Education Association (NJEA) | 23 |
| Gary Melton Manager Human & Civil Rights, Equity, and Governance New Jersey Education Association (NJEA) | 24 |
| Gabe Tanglao Associate Director of Professional Development New Jersey Education Association (NJEA) | 25 |
| Christine Miles, Ed.D. Associate Director of Professional Development and Instructional Issues | |

| | |
|---|-----|
| New Jersey Education Association (NJEA) | 26 |
| Sean Spiller Vice President New Jersey Education Association (NJEA) | 28 |
| Lillie Johnson Edwards, Ph.D. Former Commissioner, and Former Co-Chair Curriculum Committee, and Former Chair Executive Committee New Jersey Amistad Commission, and Professor Emerita, and Director American Studies, and Director Pan African Studies Drew University | 30 |
| James E. Harris President New Jersey Association of Black Educators | 34 |
| Thomas A. Puryear Former President The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) | 40 |
| APPENDIX: | |
| Letter to Joint Committee on the Public Schools submitted by Acting Commissioner Allen-McMillan | 1x |
| Testimony, and “An Intentional, Authentic, and Inclusive Learning Experience” submitted by Marie Blistan | 2x |
| Testimony, plus Biography submitted by Lillie Johnson Edwards, Ph.D. | 44x |

Testimony
submitted by
James E. Harris

49x

mej: 1-50

ASSEMBLYWOMAN MILA. M. JASEY (Co-Chair):

Thank you very much, and good morning.

Senator Rice and I are very excited to be co-chairing this morning's meeting on the Amistad Curriculum and its implementation throughout all of our school districts here in New Jersey.

I expect that everyone who is here today has something important to say, and I will ask that we respect each other's time. If you have written testimony, please submit it rather than read all of it. And if you listen carefully to each person testifying, please don't repeat anything that's been mentioned, but you can certainly say whether or not you agree or disagree with it.

So good morning, members of the joint Committee. Perhaps we should take a roll call, Becky. Thank you.

MS. SAPP (Executive Director): Senator Rice.

SENATOR RONALD L. RICE (Chair): Yes, I am present.

MS. SAPP: Senator Cryan. (no response)

I believe he is on his way.

Senator Beach. (no response)

Again, I believe he is on his way.

Senator Testa.

SENATOR TESTA: I am present, thank you.

MS. SAPP: Thank you.

Assemblywoman DeCrocce is on her way.

Assemblywoman Jasey.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Present.

MS. SAPP: Assemblywoman DiMaso.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN DIMASO: Present.

MS. SAPP: Assemblywoman Reynolds-Jackson.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Present.

MS. SAPP: Assemblyman Simonsen.

ASSEMBLYMAN SIMONSEN: Present.

MS. SAPP: And Assemblyman Wimberly.

ASSEMBLYMAN WIMBERLY: Here.

MS. SAPP: And joining us also is Assemblywoman Sumter.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SUMTER: Thank you. Present.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Thank you to each of you who are taking the time to join us this morning.

The Amistad Law, authored by our esteemed guest, Assemblyman Bill Payne -- I don't know if the Assemblyman is on yet -- who preceded me in the Assembly, was signed into law by Governor McGreevey in 2002. Strengthened by a new law signed in January, New Jersey reaffirmed our commitment to infusing the vast history of slavery and its legacy, the accomplishments of African Americans, and the effects of racial inequality into the State curriculum.

African American history is American history. When students have a thorough understanding of African American history, they are adequately prepared to work and thrive in the diverse communities throughout our State. Students of color in particular will benefit tremendously.

Teaching the wide array of African American contributions not currently captured in curriculums across the State will improve positive self-perceptions among Black students. The racial justice movements of the past decade, and notably the past year, demonstrate the need to revise, recast, and reimagine how and what we teach our students. The racial reckoning that our nation and State has had in recent years has exposed unfamiliarity and, indeed, perhaps unenlightenment that reflects this gaping hole in our education system.

The intent of recent legislation passed to fortify the Amistad Law is to ensure that its curriculum is fully incorporated in every school district in the State. For too long, students have been introduced to only certain segments of Black history. This is true not just in other states, but right here in New Jersey as well. Some school districts have barely satisfied the requirements of the original law since its passage. Many have failed, and others have not even tried to do so.

Today, Senator Rice and I are here with the Joint Committee to receive updates on implementation of the Amistad Law, recommendations on infusing the curriculum across the board, and strategies to inform and support teachers and school districts to ensure students receive a balanced and thorough exposure to the African American experience as part of their education.

Our intention is to provide districts and their teachers with every tool available to ensure that our schools fulfill the mission New Jersey embarked upon two decades ago.

And with that, I would ask Senator Rice, as Co-Chair -- would you like to make any opening remarks?

SENATOR RICE: No, no more than just to welcome everybody and thank you, Assemblywoman, for pulling this together. I know that COVID-19 has really slowed down and somewhat diminished a lot of the things that we want to do on these different committees, and it's more difficult for the joint committees to meet in between the other regular committees, particularly during COVID.

So this is important, and I want to thank NJEA for working with all of us to get us to this point. And so we can proceed if you so desire, Madam Chair, with the meeting.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: All right. Thank you, Senator, and that's exactly what we're going to do.

So we have an esteemed list of people who wish to testify today. I was going to start-- I'd like to start with Assemblyman Bill Payne. I don't see him on, has he checked in yet?

MS. SAPP: He's having an issue and we're getting him in now. So if you want to move on and then we'll come back to Assemblyman Payne.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: All right.

MS. SAPP: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: I will do that.

All right, then I would like to ask, on the Amistad Commission, the Executive Director Stephanie James Harris.

Dr. Harris, are you on?

S T E P H A N I E J A M E S H A R R I S, Ph.D.: I am here, good morning. How are you?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Good morning. And because we have so many people on, I would like for everyone to keep their remarks as short as possible, still get your message across, and then hopefully if you have written testimony please provide it to us and we'll make sure that everyone gets a copy.

Good morning.

DR. HARRIS: Good morning; thank you so very much. And I will do that. And I am sure, looking at the list of the esteemed speakers and people that I know who will be following me, a lot of what I intended to cover will also be covered; so I will allow other people to be able to handle other ancillary areas of the Amistad implementation.

My name is Dr. Stephanie James Harris, I am the Executive Director of the New Jersey Amistad Commission; I am also a professor of African American History and a former K-12 educator. It's been my pleasure to serve as the Executive Director of the Amistad Commission since 2007, and to lead the charge presented at the state-level agency that is responsible for ensuring that African American content, contributions, and experiences are historically infused and artfully taught in all New Jersey's classrooms.

We are going to be transposing African American historical content knowledge into the learning objectives for the State, and also into learning objectives for districts within social studies, the humanities, and all places appropriate, in accordance with the new law. We're teaching and learning benchmarks that can be successfully disseminated to our diversified mandated school districts across New Jersey.

In saying that, I think the most important content word that I used in that phrase was *infusion*. The reality is New Jersey's space of how it wanted to look at inclusion of African American History was not in siloed African American History courses. Although we welcome any district that would want to do a siloed African American History course in addendum -- and I say that very specifically -- the ideology is that the infusion of this historical fact means that this matter is not siloed to the side. It is something that would be infused throughout, and students would understand that African American History integrally *is* American History, and there's no way to separate the two and adequately teach History in the state and across this nation.

The primary focus of the Commission under my leadership has been the development of the model curriculum for instruction, as well as the dissemination of curriculum materials, and serving as a repository for Social Studies resources to every school in the state. I have been responsible for overseeing the direction and design of a lot of the curriculum supports, and was a part of the curriculum team (indiscernible) the design of the resource, which is an online resource for teachers, which is free and available as model curriculum that goes alongside, and as companion of, the more than 57 Social Studies textbooks and History textbooks that are in circulation across the State of New Jersey, as we speak.

So this online resource the Amistad Commission created -- the Amistad web-based curriculum resource, "A Journey Through American History" -- is free and available to every school district, every pre-service program, every library, every institution -- public, private, and parochial. And it does give the space for any juxtaposition with any textbook for any African

American inclusions that were not found in our standard curriculum materials and in our nation's textbook.

New Jersey does not have central purchasing -- it is a district in which textbooks are bought at a district-by-district level, and therefore there are a lot in circulation. And in order to be able to lead a charge for model curriculum development, we need to be able to put out a -- sort of the moniker, an exemplar, or an infusion plan, so that people can understand, side-by-side, how these histories are often juxtaposed but must be aligned. And so this work has really been a lot of the primary focus.

In addition to that, it has been in the monitoring and also the advisement for school districts. I think a lot of the *ebbs and flows* and the *reality and the challenges*, I will call them, to Amistad's implementation across the State really has come in the reality of the bureaucracy, and the institutionalization of how both curriculum is designed in this State, content standards are designed in this State -- and really looking at whose wheelhouse these responsibilities lie.

And I think that that has been some of the frustration to the challenges in Amistad implementation over the course of the last 19 years. All of the language and the verbiage -- and the verbs very specifically used for Amistad legislation -- is about our advisement, our recommendations, our ability to assist school districts. Because the reality is that school districts and school boards -- each individual school board -- are responsible for really adopting the mandate and overseeing the implementation in the district.

The Commission's job is to make sure that we can assist districts doing so -- make recommendations to do any professional developments with teachers and or professional staff; library resource

recommendations; any kind of instructional material recommendations to assist with trainings. But districts must adopt -- and the most important language in the legislation is *school boards must adopt*. That actually puts it in the wheelhouse of the districts, and with 600-plus school districts across the State, you can see the challenge as to why we are seeing it in so many different manifestations across the State.

I am happy to report that in the last two or three years we have seen our adoption into the QSAC reviews through the Department of Education, which is Quality Single Accountability Continuum -- which is the way in which districts do a self-assessment for all areas of their operations and expertise -- and the adoption of the Amistad mandate to those requirements. If a school district most especially has not demonstrated with an artifact -- not just in words, in deed -- an artifact submitted to the Department of Education and evaluated by our office, then they will not receive their points for curriculum and instruction -- which has been a game changer in regards of seeing districts really understanding what the mandate is, and really coming forward with making sure that it is demonstrated in their individual curriculum maps.

That has been, I think, the primary methodology that we have seen the most gains in the requirements of school districts really understanding that there are many kinds of punitive remediation to the adoption of the Amistad Mandate, which has been 19 years in existence. I will say that professional development for teachers, the ability to be able to incentivize them to provide training for them, to be able to provide historical resources and lectures for them -- the work coinciding with them is going to be the way in which we will see implementation.

You look at the vast variety of school districts across the State and you will see many that have done brilliant work, and then have had a shift in their leadership -- whether it's school boards or superintendents -- where a lot of those things have been eradicated or buried; and then resurfaced under a new administration.

I think QSAC will ebb that flow, and will allow it to be fully institutionalized across the State, in alignment with partnership with other agencies, and so that we will take a multi-pronged approach to making sure that Amistad is fully operationalized throughout the state.

This is legacy work. It cannot be something that we take lightly. School districts in New Jersey are indeed moving to recognize the entire part that African Americans have played at every turn of this nation's history. New Jersey has led the way in this work and has been looked at as a model for other states.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Thank you.

DR. HARRIS: And we do not take this lightly. So thank you for your time.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Thank you, Dr. Harris, that's very encouraging news, to be sure. And I will assume that hearing from some of the other commissioners, we will learn a little bit more about that.

What I'd like to ask the commissioners who are on -- I believe Jeffrey Jones and Ane Roseborough are both on. If you could give us two or three minutes, and perhaps an example of what Dr. Harris has been talking about in terms of innovation and implementation -- successes and/or not failures, but obstacles -- areas where you're still working -- we would appreciate that.

Jeffrey Jones. (no response)

Is Mr. Jones not on?

J E F F R E Y J O N E S: I apologize; I was muted.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: There he is; okay.

MR. JONES: I self-muted, so I corrected that.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Thank you.

MR. JONES: Good morning--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Good morning.

MR. JONES: To all of the distinguished legislators, my name is Jeffrey Jones. By way of background, I am a former Marine; I am a former mayor; I am a former municipal legislator; I am a former professor; and I am a former (*sic*) person with a desire to see change. I am always rising.

So I thank you for this opportunity; and I want to echo much of what the Executive Director has presented. Clearly, the time constraints do not allow for us to go into the depths and the details, but she has given you quite a significant summary.

I'll start off with some of the positives. The positives are that we have had no public outrage -- which is what I was anticipating -- about the furtherance and the implementation of Amistad. I did expect that, I did anticipate that. Also, by way of background, I'm also a former DOE employee. So I sort of understand the DOE's work, and I understand how challenges with districts can occur. But I have not heard any public concerns in terms of, *why do we have to do this and do that?* Because those kinds of ramblings were heard at some point in time, but I haven't heard it since I've been back on the Commission.

I say that to say, that, to me, gives me the sense that folks understand, *a*), by law, that this is not negotiable. This is clearly a responsibility that we all must take -- that of us, on the Commission, to ensure that the work is being done; and that of -- as the Director said -- school districts, but primarily school *boards*, who must adopt the legislation and/or the resolution so that there are no obstacles at the district level.

And what we've found is, many of the obstacles that are perceived-- And I'm sure as we continue to move through this process, those obstacles will not be because teachers decide they don't want to do the work, it is because they have not been given the green light or the support to do the work -- whatever that may entail.

And so the good and the bad are we have not relented, we have not given up on this mission. We believe, comfortably, that every child, no matter who they are, where they come from, needs to understand the benefits of this here America. And that America includes all folks contributing greatly to the fabric of America. The history of people of color is not just a solo history -- again, it's America's history. And the Amistad Commission has been empowered; and then again, through the new legislation, we have been redirected and reposed to take a look at--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: We seem to have lost Mr. Jones. Commissioner Jones, are you there?

DR. HARRIS: It looks as if he's frozen.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Yes, yes, it does. It does.

All right, I think that the points that he has already covered are very important to today's conversation, so while he's unfreezing, perhaps we can go to Commissioner Roseborough to pick up.

UNIDENTIFIED MONITOR: Excuse me, Mr. Jones, you'll have to leave the meeting and log back on.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: This is a good example of when technology works it's great, but when it doesn't, it's frustrating.

UNIDENTIFIED MONITOR: Ms. Roseborough, we're having difficulty with your audio.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Perhaps we can-- I'll come back to her.

UNIDENTIFIED MONITOR: Yes, Ms. Roseborough, I'm going to recommend that you leave the meeting and log back on, and we'll see if we can get a better connection for you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Okay. One learns to be flexible.

Next up, I would like to invite--

MS. SAPP: I believe Assemblyman Payne has joined us.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Oh, wonderful. Assemblyman Payne, are you on?

UNIDENTIFIED MONITOR: Assemblyman Payne, did you just call in from a 737 number? If you're on a phone, try holding down *6; that should enable you to talk.

MR. JONES: Hello?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: There you are.

MR. JONES: Yes, I had to switch to my cellphone. I apologize. I've been trying to do-- So anyway, I apologize, but I was able to get back on through my cellphone.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Oh, Commissioner Jones. Okay.

MR. JONES: Okay. So the good and bad become one and the same. However, I want to speak to -- for the remainder of the time that I may have -- to the obstacles, because you mentioned that, and I think it's important that we talk about that.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Two minutes.

MR. JONES: Okay. I'm hoping that the support of the Joint Committee would be that that could help us understand and maybe move through it. So what I found since I've assumed the role of Chairman - - but also as a member -- is that in the initial design of the Commission, and the way it's been operating -- and particularly when you have someone who is an in-but-not-of construct, it does make things quite complicated. And I say someone, but I do mean institutions and programs, in this case a department.

When a department or an individual who both serves on the Commission and seems not to fully engage and understand the role that we take, it does make things very complicated; and complicated to the point where the new legislation has both the New Jersey Department of Education and the Amistad Commission working in partnership. To this date, I have not been able to secure that opportunity to talk to the acting Commissioner of Education, for whatever reasons. And I think that's -- I understand.

My challenge is, as the clock ticks and we get closer to implementation -- obviously with a new budget, we hope -- the ability to hire staff with a new budget; because we're only dealing with three staff members for an entire state, which is improbable. To fully be able to support all

districts and district concerns, we needed-- And one of the things that I implemented immediately was to reach out to the District Attorney General's Office so we would have some guidance legally.

I also reached out to, obviously, the Governor's then -- Governor Murphy's appointee at the time, who is no longer available, I understand, but we don't know who that contact would be. So we are proverbially in a boat without oars. And it makes it very complicated, because we want the people -- the young people -- we want the teachers, we want the community to understand that we can move this agenda. But it is, for the most part, it is frustrating.

Over the years, our budget has been -- has barely surpassed \$258,000, and there is no way -- I mean no way -- that we could do that work with \$258,000. We are positively benefitted by the fact that the DOE legacy has allowed us to keep three of our employees -- the only three employees we have. But until such time as we can have that conversation as to what we will do moving forward, we're sort of dangling off a cliff. These are the kinds of things that we keep seeking clarity, but these are also the things that we have yet to receive the clarity.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Okay--

MR. JONES: Outside of that, we still continue to move on presenting this Institute and all other things. We have websites; we need to do that, we need to make sure that the entire New Jersey public who desires to see what the work is, what the challenges are, can see that work. But we are relegated to the framework of the DOE. They set the standards -- and this is the past; the new legislation gives us some autonomy but, again, if the budget doesn't support that, then we are back to, how do we get this done?

I won't go any further into that, but I just felt that it was imperative that I let you know, and all of those who were listening, that the Commissioners, all of them, do this voluntarily. We do this, we meet, we try our best to make sure that the mission, as stated, is secured. But we are finding that this big tonnage of a boulder, of either lack of collaboration or misunderstanding of purpose, remains in our path. And we seek support, we seek clarity, we seek assistance.

And I want to say this, and I want to make sure I put this on record. This is the first Governor -- Governor Murphy's administration -- that brought forth a budget. We submitted a \$2.8 million budget. We were informed that \$1 million is possibly on the table. But we also understand that if not for him, we still might be talking about \$258,000 to do all this work, versus what we think is credible to be able to move this massive agenda throughout the state.

So I want to say kudos and thank this administration. But I also want to say that we look forward to those others who could help us move this work so that all children throughout this State understand that this is not just about one group, it is about all of us and how we move the agenda.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN RICE: So Madam Chair--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Yes.

ASSEMBLYMAN RICE: I heard something that disturbed me, because I continue to have this conversation with the Administration. Jeff, why is it that you have not met with the Department of Education Commissioner?

MR. JONES: Good morning, Senator. Sir, I wish I had an answer. I have submitted personal -- I submitted a personal letter to the current Commissioner, and the Commissioner before her, who is in acting capacity, requesting an opportunity to sit and talk. I understand they may be busy, but just a day or two ago we got an e-mail asking for us to give some dates. And this is just recent; but eight weeks ago I submitted the letter and got no response. So I don't know what the reasons are.

ASSEMBLYMAN RICE: Well, send us a copy of the letters you submitted to both. I'm asking the staff to send a letter from the Joint Committee -- at least from the Co-Chairs, it could be the whole Committee -- indicating that we want the Acting Commissioner to meet forthwith with the Chairman and the people from Amistad.

The problem I'm having is that they know the work we're doing as legislators, and yet they continue to delay meeting with folk. And so I need a letter, Becky, that is insisting they meet right away. What I need you to do, Jeff, is if you did receive some communications, to send them some dates if that's what they are asking for.

MR. JONES: Yes, sir.

ASSEMBLYMAN RICE: Also, anything you sent to-- Here's the deal. When Amistad communicates with the administration, anything you send them in writing, you CC the Joint Committee.

MR. JONES: You got it.

ASSEMBLYMAN RICE: We can establish a follow-up, and we can follow what's going on.

MR. JONES: You got it, sir.

ASSEMBLYMAN RICE: That's okay with you, Madam Chair? Members?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Yes, definitely. Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN WILLIAM D. PAYNE: Can I interrupt for a moment, please? This is Bill Payne.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Yes; hello, Assemblyman, how are you?

ASSEMBLYMAN PAYNE: Hi; I'm good, thank you. I apologize, I'm at the beginning of a dedication of a new courtroom -- court building, beautiful court building that's been built in the city of Newark honoring Dr. Martin Luther King, and I am part of that program in a few minutes. And I apologize for not being able to stay on.

But all I want to say to everyone is that 20 years ago, we introduced this legislation, Amistad -- 20 years ago. And we still, at this time, are talking about how do we get it implemented, etc. What we need to have, of course, is number one, that everyone in the State of New Jersey recognizes, and every Department of Education -- every Board of Education recognizes that this is the law of the State of New Jersey. And I believe that the Department of Education must enforce that throughout the State.

One of the problems that we've had over the years is that school districts that have no African American students say, "We don't teach Black History because we have no Black students." That's a first misunderstanding. This is not Black History that we're talking about -- it's U.S. History. And that has to be made clear to everybody, Black and white, that this is U.S. History that we're talking about, and that every episode,

every period of history of this country, includes and should include African Americans.

When we teach about the Revolutionary War and all the rest of it, we need to teach from the very beginning that African Americans were there as well. We need to let people know that whether or not there's any Blacks living in Warren County or wherever, the Revolutionary War was fought in this Country; and everyone Black or white must be taught that. It must be taught-- If we teach about Nathan Hale, Patrick Henry, all those other people, we need to teach about Peter Salem, who fought at the Battle of Bunker Hill. That's part of it. We need to teach about those things whether or not there are Blacks or whites or whatever in those communities.

Because then what happens is that this racism becomes planted in the minds of very young people, because they see nothing but positive things from whites and negative things from Blacks. We all, Black and white, must insist that the law be enforced, and the law meaning that you teach everything that we've done here; and it's not Black History, it's U.S. History. Get that point across to everybody. That goes throughout the year.

I think it's wonderful that now we're going to celebrate Juneteenth, but there's so much more. There's blood plasma that was invented by Blacks, there's everything else, and that's not taught. And I think what we need to do, Mr. Rice -- Senator -- is to make it clear that the Department of Education has a responsibility to see into it that every single school district in the State of New Jersey -- and there's five or six hundred of them -- that they teach everything, they teach the history of our people; not just Black, not just white. And we must assume the responsibility of

attending those Board of Education meetings; and during those public sessions, every single one of us, we must let them know that we know it's a law in the State of New Jersey and we insist that it be taught.

And then the Department of Education has to stand behind it. Not just the Amistad, but the Department of Education has a responsibility to see to it that we are implementing and teaching history in its entirety. And it's our hope that the members of the Assembly, and the Senate, and the rest will stand behind it and insist on it. But it's the law of the State, it's not just something that we teach. It's the law of the State for Blacks, white people, etc. And I think that would go a major way in stopping the racism, etc.

Like I said, I apologize. But we've been living with this for over 20 years, and I'm sure that if you understand what we're talking about, that this is a law that must be enforced. QSAC must be used so that they can evaluate whether or not *the* district is doing-- No district should be able to step aside and not do it.

We've gone to Chicago, Illinois, and they adopted the legislation; New York adopted the legislation; New Jersey should be showing the way, and we certainly hope that all of us will be able to understand that this is American History -- and not just in February, but it's all seasons. I'm sorry-- I don't apologize for being--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: No, don't apologize. Don't apologize, Assemblyman, you have truly summarized exactly why we're having this conversation today. And someone told me years ago that persistence is an intelligent behavior; and certainly 20 years of your persistence merits that description.

ASSEMBLYMAN PAYNE: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: So I thank you very much; we thank you for joining us this morning, and do not apologize for having to go to the dedication. I'm looking forward to seeing that myself sometime soon.

ASSEMBLYMAN PAYNE: Thank you all; thank you so much.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Thank *you* so much.

Let's see, I think we were going to have Commissioner Roseborough on for a couple of minutes. Are you on, Commissioner?

A N E R O S E B O R O U G H: (indiscernible)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Yes, there you are, Ms. Roseborough. The floor is yours.

MS. ROSEBOROUGH: Yes, I am on. (indiscernible)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: We're not hearing you. We're not hearing you completely.

MS. ROSEBOROUGH: The sound quality is better.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: No. Can you--

MS. ROSEBOROUGH: (indiscernible)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Becky, can you ask her to call back in?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: I would next ask Marie Blistan, President of NJEA, for her remarks.

M A R I E B L I S T A N: Thank you, Assemblywoman Jasey; and thank you Senator Rice. Thank you to all the legislators on this Joint Committee for holding this hearing. And Assemblyman Payne, it is my honor to see you

and to meet you; you are infamous in our history. And as a classroom teacher for all these many years, I applaud and am so thankful to you for leading this well over 20 years ago.

So with that said, we have submitted testimony -- we will not be reading it, but we are going to highlight some very important key points that we know need to be said, and we also want to be on the record with having said it. With me today is our current Vice President, Sean Spiller, who will be the incoming President starting September 1; our current Secretary-Treasurer, Steve Beatty, who will be the incoming Vice President; and some very key staff members at NJEA: our newest director of Human and Civil Rights, Gary Melton, Jr.; our Director of Government Relation, Al Beaver; and two important Associate Directors, Gabe Tanglao and Dr. Christine Miles.

The mandate of the Amistad Law, as you know, is also to train, and educate, and support the educators who are tasked with teaching the truth about history, the truth about the trans-Atlantic slave trade that we participated in. The truth about African History -- the rich African History that has contributed to this world. And also the rich history of African Americans in this country.

With that in mind, in 2018, after I became President, looking around, having this forum, we realized that it was not being implemented the way it should be and there was much more work to be done. I reached out to a number of stakeholders at the State level, including principals, supervisors, school boards, Superintendents, PTA, a number of people -- the Amistad Commission -- and asked if they would be willing to join together to form a task force to look at this and move it forward.

And I am thrilled when I tell you that not one person turned us down. In fact, the group that you have -- you have a list of our stakeholders right now on this task force -- has grown since the initial meeting in 2018. And we're still taking volunteers, so anyone here, just let us know. We came together and we formed a report, which you have also received a copy of, with 12 recommendations. Steve Beatty and others will highlight a few of those things a little bit later on.

But I'm going to make note here that we have Tom Puryear here, who is part of the NAACP, who is also with us; Nat Peano had also asked to join us. And we have, very importantly, McGraw Hill book company, thanks to Gary Melton, Jr., who has agreed to come onboard with us, study the work that we're doing with revising the curriculum, and getting it out there and then moving forward in textbooks. So it is a landmark thing that we are doing, and I do agree with Dr. Harris that New Jersey is absolutely in the lead.

I also want to make special note that out of the 12 recommendations that you see in that report, with a task force that we are going to all move forward, a number of those initiatives are being funded strictly by NJEA. And I think that is extremely important because it is the dedication and commitment of our members that makes that possible.

We also drafted a purpose statement that I will not read, but I do ask each of you to take a look at that. It took us a while to draft, and we needed to come to consensus on what it meant, because it's more than just words -- it has to be the actions along with it. One of the most, I think, significant accomplishments that we had was right after the acting Commissioner at that time, Dr. Lamont Repollet, was put into place, I made

an appointment with him -- that was in 2018 -- and I talked to him about the work that I wanted to do. He immediately said that he would join our task force and he talked to me.

And so that QSAC piece, that accountability piece, is extremely important and it's critical. We're not trying to get or got to any place, but we are trying to elevate the role, the accountability, and the responsibility of all of us. We know that we are very proud of the work that we've done so far, but we also are here to acknowledge that there is much more work to be done. And we want to thank the legislators who have agreed to sponsor and move forward our Amistad Award.

And so with that, I'm going to turn this over to our current Secretary-Treasurer, incoming Vice President Steve Beatty.

STEVE BEATTY: Well thank you Marie, and thank you all for the opportunity to really share this important work. Marie mentioned, of course, the task force recommendations -- and I'm not going to read through all of them, they're on page 17 of the report that we helped to author -- but I just wanted to highlight a few very important issues and just give a little bit of entree into what they mean and, again, how they will be implemented in meaningful, sustained ways.

First of all, the profession development piece. Professional development for educators through NJEA-hosted conferences and events, as well as conferences and events hosted by other stakeholders. We know this can't be done alone, it has to be a joint effort, but we're leading the way in that work. And, listen -- as a classroom teacher myself for 25 years, this cannot be just another checkbox-type of implementation, right? There has to be intention, that type of deep planning and sustainability fostered not

just from NJEA work in that, but all of our stakeholders from the Department of Ed, obviously the Commission, principals and supervisors -- all of them that get involved towards our goal.

Secondly, to partner with higher education institutions to make sure our aspiring educators are prepared, they understand what this is at that level, and can bring that into the profession. And again, at NJEA we're working very hard, we have now some agreements with some of the colleges to implement what we're calling a *pre-service academy*. We actually bring in potential educators, membership in our organization; and with that, training and deep-dive on things just like this to help fulfill that mandate and bring them forward into schools all ready with this information, to help their school district now turnkey that.

Third, decree the Amistad Journey. A fantastic opportunity for educators to be immersed -- right? The experience is transformative when you are able to actually go see, immerse yourself in that and experience it at all those historic sites. Here, of course, in the United States, but also, as you know, in Africa. And of course the pandemic interrupted our plans to launch that, but we look forward to getting that going as soon as possible.

Fourth, to have the Amistad Award to elevate, promote, and encourage creative implementation of the law. And we're very grateful to, of course, Senator Rice on the call here today, Senator Sweeney as well, for their work in getting that passed by the Senate; and we're hopeful now on the Assembly side with the help of Assemblywomen Lampitt, Quijano, McKnight, and Jasey. And we'll soon have that done and available for this coming year.

And lastly, to continually work to update this curriculum. This is a process, we know that, and we're just starting to get into those institutions that really control -- the book companies, the curricular writing, all those things that will help us develop the structures within the structures, build new structures, tear down old ones to really address where that needs to go.

And our own Dr. Christine Miles will address that momentarily; before she does, I would like to pass this over to our own Gary Melton and Gabe Tangalo to speak briefly about some of the work we have done to move this work forward. Thank you.

GARY MELTON: Thank you, Steve. My name is Gary Melton, and I am happy and so honored to be here with everyone here today.

We know that these are difficult challenges that we are presented with -- especially now in looking at our society and what is going on in terms of racial social justice. This is why we reached out to Germany and to South Africa, so that we can see what they have done in terms of the Holocaust and Apartheid. How did they change the dynamic, how did they change the atrocities that happened in those regions? What did they do educationally?

And one of the things that we're so proud of is that some of the information that they gave us actually helped to drive what we're attempting to do here in our own country.

And so to speak a little bit more, and even move it into the working with the textbooks, I'm going to pass it off to Gabe Tanglao, who is going to further what we're doing.

GABE TANGLAO: Thank you, Gary.

And as Marie mentioned earlier, representatives from the textbook publisher McGraw Hill have reached out to us to discuss their interest in revising future printings of history books to reflect authentic representation of this part of our history. And that ties into all of the work that Gary just illustrated, and Steve. And we know that this work can be done well and with the correct preparation.

On our taskforce, we have had educators from Pleasantville, Logan Township, and others where there were strong examples of curriculum development and professional learning experiences that could be replicated and learned from. The firsthand experience of classroom practitioners is critical. And in providing those perspectives and expertise to help our task force see what's possible, that's something that we make sure is integrated into the work that we do with our members.

And with that, I'm actually going to introduce my colleague, Dr. Chrissi Miles, to discuss the work that we're doing to update the Amistad Curriculum.

DR. CHRISTINE MILES: Thank you, Gary and Gabe. As Marie and Steve have noted, NJEA has convened a group of exceptional elementary, middle, and high school-level practitioners to re-envision the Amistad Curriculum. Our work is guided by the *Understanding by Design* framework, aligned to the 2020 New Jersey Student Learning Standards, and heavily anchored in themes of truth, identity, diversity, justice, and action.

Through this re-envisioned curriculum, we will intentionally move beyond the mere acquisition of factually and historically accurate content knowledge and towards exploration, meaning-making, and deep transfer of understanding. Our curriculum designs will allow students

to demonstrate authentic performance as they explore essential questions such as, “How do we find truth when some stories are told and others are silenced?” “Who am I? Why am I?” “How has where I’ve come from influenced who I am?” “How might we explore and express our identities without disrespecting or devaluing the identity of others?”

And this NJEA-funded endeavor has an extremely aggressive timeline. It’s going to allow us to release the first phase of K-12 curricular frameworks and resources by late summer 2021. And as we know, curriculum has to be living and breathing, so the design process will never end. Our work will continue as we refine, review, and further build systems, resources, and supports that are needed for educator and student success. And our design work will continue as educators return from the Amistad Journey experience and put their new learning into action and practice that their fellow practitioners can learn from as well.

Our design work will continue until our students can independently and critically evaluate the social, culture, political, and historical narratives, while questioning distorted representations and challenging assumptions in order to communicate in ways that balance power and privilege. Our work will break down barriers and ensure representation of both the trials and the triumphs of historically marginalized peoples, paving the way for the greater inclusion of diverse voices and perspectives across the curriculum.

Now I’m pleased to introduce NJEA’s Vice President and incoming President, Mr. Sean M. Spiller.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Thank you; Sean, may I take a moment to give Assemblywoman Shavonda Sumter, who has a question, and then we will get right back to you?

And I want to say to the team, the NJEA team, I compliment you on moving through your testimony quickly and effectively. That was a great example for all of us.

Assemblywoman Sumter.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SUMTER: Thank you. And greetings everyone.

Sean, you may be able to answer this question, so that's why I wanted to ask it before you all continued. Please advise if you all are, NJEA, working with the Amistad Commission on these curriculum build-outs. As we know, Dr. Harris mentioned that she has been pretty much a solo operation for all of these years, so if we can coordinate.

And then also, to the Committee, we also know that we have this segment known as *charter schools* and *private schools*. So while NJEA has done a lot, hearing from Assemblyman Bill Payne -- making sure that we infiltrate all schools for the learning opportunity, if we can look at how we elevate that with DOE, as we work through these pieces, with recommendations.

And thank you all.

MS. BLISTAN: Assemblywoman, I would like to take that question, if you don't mind.

So to your answer, yes -- Dr. Harris was part of our Amistad task force right from the beginning. She's the signatory of our

report, she knows all the 12 recommendations, which include curriculum. We're most happy to continue to work with her.

And with our charter schools, we represent our members, as you well know, but we do represent some of the charter schools and are also happy to work with them.

S E A N M. S P I L L E R: All right, and with that, thank you Madam Chair, Mr. Chair, all the Assembly members, Senators on here; thank you so much for affording us a few moments.

As you noted, Madam Chair, we move through pretty efficiently, so I don't plan on breaking that up now. I will do the same and just kind of wrap this together. And as Marie noted in answering some of those questions, you know, we all are working on this together.

But I think the main thing that hopefully everyone has taken away from this is how serious we are taking this work. It is so important that we really take the lead on this. We know that with our 200,000 members educating our students, it is important; it is quite frankly a responsibility that we have to lead the way in making sure this is universally implemented in New Jersey, so that New Jersey can serve as an example throughout the United States for how critical this material is; how critical it is that all children, all Americans understand this; and that we are all working together to make sure that happens.

I certainly want to commend my friend, my partner, our President, Marie Blistan, for her leadership. It is her leadership that got us moving in this direction. But I also think it's important that everyone on here hears that I am, as the incoming President of NJEA, fully committed to building on this, and that as NJEA moves through our growth as a justice-

centered union, this is not just a project that we're working around, or one law, one curriculum. It's a culture shift; it's intended to reshape our approach to every issue that's confronting our schools and our State. With regard to this work, the implementation work, we're investing time, as you see here with all the staff members who are on.

We are investing resources -- Marie noted that already and spoke to a lot of that. We're working with stakeholders, as was just reiterated, because there are so many of us that do share this goal. But it takes all of us working together, providing the attention that's needed to make sure we're seeing success. It has been too long where we've seen something on the books, if you will, but that hasn't been really incorporated into our students' learning.

We plan to reconvene the task force in early fall to review the progress around all of these recommendations and to continue to build on this shared goal of teaching the full history of the United States, even when that can be challenging and uncomfortable. We know the law requires it; but more importantly, our students deserve it and we're committed to doing it.

So I'll just say this in closing. We're committed to pursuing equity and justice in all areas of public education. We look forward to working with the members of this Committee. And we look forward to working with all of our partners in this work, and also additional partners who join on, as Marie had asked, to make sure that we're moving forward; and, yes, keeping our schools the best in the nation, but making sure that we're teaching all our students about true American History.

And we thank you for all of your time.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Thank you, incoming President Spiller. I very much appreciate your brevity and your depth. And the coordinated way in which you have all presented your information.

Now I have a couple -- a few more people to speak, and then we will open it up to questions from the members from the Assembly and Senate to ask. I believe Lillie Johnson Edwards, Co-Chair of the Curriculum Committee -- are you on?

LILLIE JOHNSON EDWARDS, Ph.D.: I am indeed on. Thank you so very much.

I submitted my transcript to the Committee, and I'm happy to share it directly with any of you; you can contact me at ledwards@drew.edu. I am Professor Emeritus of African American Studies and History, and the founding Director of Pan-African Studies and Director of American Studies, Drew University, retired as of 2016. I served on the Commission from 2002 to January 2020, and my last act as Co-Chair of the Curriculum Committee and Chair of the Executive Committee was to draft with the former Mayor of Willingboro and Commissioner Lavonne Bebler-Johnson -- we drafted what is now the new Amistad legislation signed by the Governor on January 7, 2021. And it was my honor to do that work as my last service as a member of the Commission.

However, as a public historian now, I continue that work in working with school districts and other agencies. Since I submitted my transcript and will make it available to any of you who requested it, I will simply thank the Chairpersons and say hello to all my Montclair neighbors here, and to thank you for the invitation.

What I have submitted in the transcript, which I will simply summarize here, is a combination of critique and specific recommendations. My concerns are two-fold. One is that there would be a very clearly outlined strategy and timetable to reach specific goals. And in that, I am so gratified and excited by the NJEA work that seems to mirror much of what I have recommended in my own transcript. I would like to highlight just a few of those, out of respect for your time.

One of the things that I have found in my work is that school boards -- school districts -- are not really clear on what steps they are to take. And so what I developed in 2019 was a five-step kind of minimal requirement for school districts. I'm happy to share those with you, because the response I received from school districts was, "We can do this."

I also created a list of recommendations coming out of the work that Amistad is currently doing. First, the Summer Institute, which we know is a centerpiece of Amistad work in training and being able to make a difference in the teaching of hundreds of teachers. The former Director and I designed that Institute to not only train teachers, but also to produce a body of lesson plans, so that teachers would have access to -- immediate and ready access -- to lessons. It sounds similar, in fact, to what NJEA is doing now; and I would recommend that the Summer Institute return to that kind of collaborative work of having teachers themselves be part of the process of producing those lessons.

I also recommend that as NJEA is working on curriculum development, that the website that is currently up for Amistad needs to be taken offline, because it lacks sufficient quantity and quality for it to be truly useful to teachers. It needs to be completely revamped -- perhaps working

through the task force that NJEA has created in that curricular work. It has inaccuracies, it has spaces that are, let's say, blank. And also, to my horror, in looking and taking a deep dive, I noted some very clear ethnic caricatures and stereotypes that I think really malign the significance of this work.

And then, finally, I think that one of the things that Amistad needs to do -- one of the recommendations I listed -- was that we also have no tracking and database that reveals to us what work has been done, what work is in process, and what the goalpost is. Out of those 686 districts, I have no idea where there is a list of which districts have done what work. We know that Montclair has done the work, yes; we know that Hoboken, we know that Roselle, we know that West Orange has done the work. But there is no database that really tracks the work of school districts so that we can, number one, hold up certain districts as models, place those models onto a website portal so other school districts can see what Montclair has done; they can see what Hoboken has done. They actually don't need to re-invent this plan.

And that, finally, I think-- But NJEA is doing, in some ways, one of the cornerstones of my recommendations. And that is, the Amistad Commission and staff are not working solo. There are institutions all over the State of New Jersey that have been doing this work all along. Museums do teacher training and inclusive curriculum; libraries, colleges and universities; historical societies, whether local or county historical societies. I have worked with the National Park Service at Washington headquarters on this kind of work.

And so I think what is missing is coordination. Similar to what has been presented, with NJEA creating this kind of task force, if you

think about all of these organizations, in reality we have the State of New Jersey covered -- not from Amistad staff working alone, but rather working in coordination with institutions that truly cover the entire state and have a track record of doing this work and a track record of fulfilling the mission.

And then finally, I would like to say to the Legislature: Yes, Amistad needs to be fully funded, it needs to be fully funded not solely in terms of staff, but in terms of markers that show us that there's a strategy to achieve the goal. I think a lot of work has been done, but work has been done in a kind of vacuum that doesn't have clear targets.

And then, finally, I also feel very strongly that we need to recognize the districts that have done the work. In the past, we actually had Amistad Awards that the former director and I created to honor and recognize districts who had done especially good work, and to honor specific teachers who had done that work in their classroom. Those model districts then set up a template, again for other districts to follow. And I can't say this enough -- that there are enough red carpets, as far as I'm concerned, for us to roll out for excellence in teaching and excellence in executing the teaching of our students.

I will stop there, and thank you, and let everyone in this meeting know that, again, I am available to continue this work I've been doing in public history and working with school districts. I think I'm doing something with Somerville in another week, and I talked to the teachers in Maple Shade two weeks ago.

Thank you very much for this invitation, and I welcome any questions, in particular about the legislation. Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Thank you very much, Dr. Edwards. I would love to continue the conversation, but I am mindful of my members' time because we are in budget season, so our schedules are changing on a daily basis -- literally.

I would like to give James Harris of the New Jersey Association of Black Educators, and Tom Puryear a few minutes to add to the conversation today, and then I will open it up to members to ask their questions.

James Harris, are you on?

JAMES E. HARRIS: Good morning.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Thank you. Hello.

MR. HARRIS: Good morning Chairpersons, the Honorable Assemblywoman Mila Jasey and the Honorable Senator Ron Rice. Thank you so very much for the opportunity, and all of the members of the Committee, thank you so very much for having this Hearing this morning.

I am James E. Harris, I am the President of the New Jersey Association of Black Educators, and I am also one of the original charter members of the New Jersey Amistad Commission. But because the representatives from Amistad have already spoken, I will be speaking from the perspective of the New Jersey Association of Black Educators.

The New Jersey Association of Black Educators is a statewide organization committed to excellence and equity in all levels of education throughout the State. And let me say that I agree with much of what has been said. The New Jersey Association of Black Educators has made this one of our top priorities, and as most of you know we've been all over the State pointing out the fact that 19 years later, we are extremely

disappointed -- *extremely* disappointed -- that those young people who will be graduating from high school this year would have gone through their entire educational experience being taught the history of African Americans in this country if this law had been implemented.

So I won't-- I have divided my statement into two parts: the challenges that we've had; but I'll go directly to the recommendations that I think are very important right now.

First of all, we want to thank those legislators who sponsored the revision in the law. Because if you read the law very carefully, it really now identifies exactly who is responsible for doing what. The Department of Education has been removed in some places, and the Commission has now embraced much of the responsibility. However, we need a budget -- and I'm just so happy to hear that you're going to go from this meeting to the budget, because I'm hearing in all of the media that the State is flush with money. So it doesn't seem like a long step for members of the Legislature to suggest that the \$2.8 million budget that the Amistad Commission approved should be inserted before it goes to the Governor for his signature.

The other thing I want to say is that I am happy to hear that NJEA is now on board, because for 18 years -- 19 years, it appeared that they were missing in action. When I've gone to Trenton, they have always been there with a large staff of people, so I know that they were very much aware that this law was passed some 19 years ago. But when you look at what has happened all over the State of New Jersey, somebody didn't get the message; and if they got the message, they did not respond according to the law.

And let me just say that we've just experienced a long history of people who think they are above the law, and the New Jersey Association of Black Educators believes no one in this state, including educators, should be above the law. But I'm also asking that the legislators be cognizant of the fact-- When I was at Southside High School, I was taught that there were three branches of government. There was the Executive, there was the Judicial, and then there was the Legislative. The legislative did its job, thanks to Senator Rice, Bill Payne, and some of the legislators that are still in the Legislature.

But the legislation was passed -- the executive branch seemingly fell apart. I believe the responsibility of education rests with the Commissioner of Education. We've gone through about six or seven Commissioners, and many of them had different responses to the New Jersey Legislature. I'm glad to see Tom Puryear is on today, because it was Tom Puryear and I who met with the Lieutenant Governor when she became the Secretary of State, and was about to put the Amistad Commission in with the faith-based business. And luckily for the staff and the Amistad, they transferred the responsibility over to the Department of Education. But we've had about eight Commissioners of Education with different commitment, understanding, and support for the law.

The other issue that has really-- If we want to be honest, the Commission itself has not been effectively resourced with people who are committed to the business. We have had people who were appointed to the Commission -- and you can only get there through the Governor or the President of the Senate, or the Speaker of the Assembly -- but we've had people who were appointed who never fulfilled their responsibilities. And for

some years we had Commission meetings where we couldn't get a quorum because apparently people thought they had a title but no responsibility.

We need some type of provision that will say individuals who are appointed but who refuse to do their work should be removed, plain and simple. Because to have a meeting where people come from all over the State and only find out that over half of the people decided not to show up - Very much to Ms. Ane Roseborough's credit, we need more classroom teachers as Commissioners. Ms. Roseborough, I believe, is the only current classroom teacher.

So when we sit to make these regulations or think about policies, we need to have somebody who is going to say, "This is what it's going to look like when it gets to the building." The law clearly states that the Commission is authorized to ask other departments of government for support. So therefore, we need to get other departments of government supporting the needs and aspirations to get this done.

And finally, I want to say we have a very racially segregated State in New Jersey; it's been documented. And we have a very racially -- racial dynamic that goes on where people say, "If there's no Black folks around, why do we need to teach Black History?" The law applies to all of the schools in the State, whether they're in Cape May, Hunterdon, Essex -- this law applies to everybody. So my recommendation is that we get more support from the legislators to see if this law is being implemented.

And I really do want to thank you very much for having this Joint Committee specifically focused on the Amistad. Because I believe that this is the process by which people have taken interest and moved the agenda. I want to give particular credit to Commissioner Repollet, who was

the first Commissioner who got the State Board of Education to put the Amistad mandate into QSAC. So now all of the school districts in the State will have to go through a process of demonstrating.

But as a guy who has been in the military, I know that people respect what you inspect, and so we need to make sure that when they go to do the evaluation, that it's not a paper practice, and somebody has to really go deep down into the classroom and see what the teachers are really doing.

The final thing: We need to make sure that in the State of New Jersey all of the teachers who get certified to teach are informed and equipped to teach the mandates of Amistad. We have colleges and universities that produce teachers -- not enough African American teachers, and particularly not enough African American males and Latino males -- but we should not be graduating people who are certified to teach in the State of New Jersey knowing full well that they're not equipped to know how to obey the law.

So I look forward to working with NJEA. And let me just say, as a Commissioner, to be very honest, a lot of the work that is now being reported was completely unknown to the Commissioners. We didn't know that there was going to be an announcement about the Amistad Journey in 2018. I was standing on the stage, I was there with Cornel West; I was there with Dr. Stephanie James Harris. And nobody even mentioned that Dr. Stephanie James Harris was the Executive Director. And Bill Payne most certainly was not there, because he did not know until the last minute.

So if there's communication, to be affective, it not only has to be siloed, it needs to be shared. The New Jersey Amistad Commission is

the organization that is given legal responsibility for implementing the law, so if there's somebody out there doing some magic things like the, you know, NJEA or AFT or the New Jersey Bar Association, it's important that they communicate that to the Commission that's responsible for implementing the law.

But I do want to say that we work very hard, and the new Commissioners who came on four years ago have really given us the energy and the commitment, and we look forward to moving ahead and making sure that in the future the children will go home and say, "Mom did you know that Black folks fought in every war this country's ever fought in? Did you know that there was Tulsa? Did you know there was an Emmett Till?" But we just don't want people tearing up Ebony Magazine in February and thinking that they've complied with the Amistad law.

Thank you so very much, and we look forward to working with you in the future.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Thank you, James Harris. Appreciate it.

I have a note to myself that I was going to give Ane Roseborough, Commissioner Ane Roseborough, a chance to come back on because she was having difficulty with her audio. Are you on? There you are, okay.

MS. ROSEBOROUGH: (indiscernible) I am on.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: You know what--

MS. ROSEBOROUGH: (indiscernible) Do I sound okay?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: No. It's still garbled, to me. I'm really sorry, it's still not coming through clearly; you're not coming through.

MS. ROSEBOROUGH: Let me try something -- (indiscernible). I'm really sorry about this.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: If you have testimony that you'd like to submit, please submit it to our Executive Director, Becky Sapp, and she will make sure that all the members have it. Thank you very much for your persistence, but we still can't hear you.

At this time, I would like to ask if members, Assembly and Senate members, have questions or comments that they would like to make.

Oh -- wait, Tom Puryear; are you still on, Tom?

T H O M A S A. P U R Y E A R: I am still on, Assemblywoman. But I deferred to my colleagues and there's no testimony that I wish to give at this moment in time. I do thank you for the opportunity, however.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Okay, thank you. I did not mean to slight you, sir.

MR. PURYEAR: No problem. Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: So having heard all this testimony, which has been both enlightening and overwhelming -- but also encouraging -- I would like to now open the floor to members if you have questions or comments; and know that if you would like a transcript of today's testimony, you can have it in writing or in recording -- via recording.

Yes, Assemblywoman Sumter.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SUMTER: Thank you, Madam Chair. I truly wanted to make sure that all of the persons on this Zoom had

an opportunity to share what they were doing in this space. I thought it was important, especially at this moment in time where we're about to celebrate Juneteenth Day for the first time as a holiday in the State of New Jersey; let alone the civil unrest that we experienced last year with the loss of Mr. George Floyd; and what we heard from students across the State, as legislators, who were looking to learn more about African Americans' role, and impact in these United States.

So this is one of those programs that we've supported as a Legislature, as a Legislative Black Caucus, as we've heard. So hearing all of the different thought leaders in this space was important -- so I want to thank you for taking the time in this busy season; and the Senators, and all of my colleagues for taking the time, really, to host this hearing so we can have all the thought leaders in this space, have this important conversation.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Thank you,
Assemblywoman. Assemblyman Wimberly.

ASSEMBLYMAN WIMBERLY: Thank you,
Chairwoman; Co-Chair Rice. Just to say this has been informative as usual when we have the topic of Amistad. But you know, to Assemblyman Payne, it is somewhat discouraging, but yet I think more of a motivation that 20 years later we're still in the same spot having the same conversations.

And to my friend James Harris, I will say part of the issue with New Jersey being so segregated as we are, and divided by zip codes -- this is something that is important for every area of New Jersey. This is just not about the urban areas; this is just not about Black and people of color; but this also leads to the discussion with our friends at the NJEA and

administration about the recruitment of more minority Black male teachers and teachers of color, because I think that benefits everyone.

I think the Black teacher in Northern Valley or Old Tappan is as important as the Black teacher in Patterson or Newark or Camden. These are the differences that we must close, and as Assemblywoman Sumter said, after this past year of social, you know, challenges when it comes to George Floyd and many other issues, we cannot let this just stop here. We have to keep moving. We thank -- you know, the celebration of Juneteenth being a holiday, but we have a long way to go.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Thank you, Assemblyman.
Senator Cryan.

SENATOR CRYAN: Thank you, Assemblywoman, and Co-Chair Rice as well.

I probably echo a little bit of what Benjie and Shavonda said. But I do want (indiscernible) a follow-up would be good here. Because there was so much data, and frankly-- By the way, having testimony ahead of time was very, very helpful, and I thank the folks who sent it. I had a chance to read it.

I'm supposed to make a plug now that the Township of Union should be included as someone who has integrated, who has put forward the Amistad curriculum in schools. As you check your districts -- which I did have a chance to, because we had it ahead of time.

A couple of comments. To Benjie's point, I think we should (indiscernible) a very respectful suggestion. Since we waited 20 years and had the encouraging discussion that we had today, perhaps a follow-up

in a few months in terms of where we are on the curriculum, on the innovative ideas that the NJEA brought forth.

The comments Dr. Harris talked about -- maybe we could follow up and not let the momentum of today slide a little bit -- not in a bad way, it just feels like there's new optimism around it, and maybe the Juneteenth celebration helps with that as well.

I'd also be remiss if I didn't appreciate the comments made about the Black teacher in Old Tappan and the rest. I do think it's important that we discuss the segregation issue, and I want to lend my voice to that. I know it's come up, I know it's an area of concern; but the true way to solve it -- the true way ultimately to solve this is have fully integrated, fully understanding schools, with curriculums and students that have the generational fortitude to be able to move forward. And I think that's kind of where we'll end up being here.

So I really wanted to take a moment and thank the staff, the speakers -- to your point about the brevity, they're appreciated.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Thank you very much, Senator, for being on today. And we have made a note of that; we will definitely have a follow up meeting. We'll talk about that--

SENATOR CRYAN: You're good.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: But Senator Rice and I will definitely follow up.

SENATOR CRYAN: Thanks.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Senator Rice, you would like to make--

SENATOR RICE: Oh, yes, I want to put some things in perspective, that's what I always try to do. And sometimes in the Senate, people don't understand the leadership -- or my non-minority colleagues.

As the Legislative Black Caucus, we have done, with the Latino Caucus, a lot of things -- and some of our other colleagues too -- and really starting to get people to understand the need for social justice and economic justice reform. And we were pushing that through our Joint Committee on Economic Justice and Equal Employment Opportunities; trying to push through Disparity Committee and through Chief Diversity Officer work.

When we talk about social justice reform and criminal justice reform, I think that we'll do better in the future if we implement the history of Black folks and the struggle, and what that means to our people -- what it meant to our people over the years; and while we're still in urban cities, in particular, and other areas, not working, hanging out on the street corner, things like that.

I think it would have to be shaped to the younger generation coming up, and I think if we reshape the younger generation coming up we'll start to get the respect we demand from "white folks" -- that's the only way I can put it -- and others. And if not, then we can take other actions. But I think it's all relevant to what we've been trying to do; and I think we need to educate our colleagues in the Legislature and the Governor's administration, because sometimes they say they're with us, and then they throw bones and bury us on the way, as though -- you know, with us, they don't really want to implement anything or they want to dilute our policies.

And so this is important work that we are doing, and the Amistad Commission needs to make sure they keep integrity in the process and focus. There are things that I monitored and didn't say too much about, even when Commissioner Repollet was there and we were trying to move some pieces through QSAC, etc.; and everybody wanted to go to Washington, which was a waste of funding, number one, because the stuff that we could have done and we need to do could have been done here.

So we need to be very mindful as Commissioners as to what our mission is, and how we can be conservative where we need to be in terms of dollars and cents, and how we structure policy and make decisions. So it's not about traveling all the time, and it's not about perks. It's about these young people learning the history of our people over the years, since 1619.

So thank you very much, Madam Chair.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Thank you, Senator and Co-Chair of this Committee. As usual, I think you've done a good job of wrapping up and summarizing.

But before we close, I want to give Assemblywoman Verlina Reynolds-Jackson a moment to speak.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: I just wanted to thank everyone on this call, and just to be mindful-- When I spoke with Dr. Repollet before he left, we talked about this, "in but not of DOE." When the new acting Commissioner came in, I also had conversations with her about this Amistad Commission. And so to hear all of this information come out today, thank you to NJEA and all of our partners that are on this call and working in this space. We've been talking about teacher recruitment

amongst us and the New Jersey Legislative Black Caucus. How do we develop great teachers who will be able to teach this sensitive subject and be empowered so they are not shifting off any unintentional biases to our students?

But it's important also that we continue to hold our districts accountable, and I heard that over and over again. We have 600-plus districts, and I don't know if we have our State Board of school boards as a part of this conversation. I'm hoping that they are. I know that these are just conversations that are all ongoing, and we don't have to operate in siloes. I hate having meetings with 10 different groups when we can just all have them together.

So today, for me, I'm just in awe, I'm just -- I want to follow back up, because again, this is a working group and we have a lot of information that's going to be coming out, and holding our districts accountable.

The other piece I wanted to mention was about the funding. And so funding is very important. The website is absolutely correct -- it needs to come down. It is so outdated and it does need to be done. So I think when we start to say, you know, about little things that we can do, our baby steps that we take in this long journey, we have some things that we can do immediately, and we have some things that are going to take a little bit longer.

But I have reached out to the Speaker and asked him to appoint me to the Amistad Commission so that we continue this work as well. So I look forward to working with all of you on this journey so that we

can improve the quality of education for all of our students. And thank you for your testimony today.

SENATOR RICE: So, Madam Chair, maybe the Chair of the Legislative Black Caucus can back up the Assemblywoman by sending a letter respectfully encouraging her appointment to the Committee. He'll probably do it, because he does work with us, but I think if he knew it was something we were looking at in terms of having representation there, it will get done.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SUMTER: Through the Chair -- I do know that Assemblywoman Reynolds-Jackson, and Assemblyman Antwan McClellan on the R side, had requested to go on the Amistad Commission. I believe it was granted, but we'll verify.

Thank you. And Dr. Harris, please reach out to them with schedule dates and meetings, and all that good stuff.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Thank you Assemblywoman, and thank you Senator Rice as well.

And also, I just wanted to make a point, to Assemblyman Wimberly's point. In May 2019, Governor Murphy signed into law a pilot program to recruit minority men to the teaching profession. The pandemic has had a negative impact, but we will follow up with that and certainly continue in that area. That has been a goal of mine for many years, to see our teaching force represent the society that we live in.

Are there any other questions or comments that anyone would like to make? (no response)

I realize it's been kind of a long meeting, but I think it's been a really good meeting. And, you know, timing is everything. And I

believe very strongly that when the timing is right, things move quickly. And I remember when I first came into the Legislature, Bill Payne was there at my side and we talked about this legislation -- and that was in 2007, I believe.

So I've been told persistence is an intelligent behavior, so I guess I'm smart because I'm still persisting, and so are all of you. And with that, I want to thank everyone for their time and their input today. As I said, if you would like a transcript of this testimony today you can certainly ask for it. And I look forward to seeing some of you soon, and all of you, certainly, in the future.

And if I don't see you again, to the members, we will definitely have a follow-up meeting to *this* meeting in the late fall or early winter time frame.

SENATOR RICE: Madam Chair, is Senator Testa still on, do you know?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Senator Testa--

SENATOR RICE: Because of Budget.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: I don't see him on, no.

SENATOR RICE: Okay, no problem. I just wanted to encourage him to stand behind Antwan down there. Sometimes non-minority Republicans don't see things, like some non-minority Democrats, the way Blacks and Latinos see it. But I think he'll be there with him, but I'll talk to him.

ASSEMBLYMAN SIMONSEN: Senator Rice, it's Assemblyman Simonsen. We will make sure that happens for you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Okay, thank you Assemblyman Simonsen. And I want to thank Assemblywoman DeCroce for being on; Assemblywoman DiMaso. Who have I missed?

All right, with that, the meeting is adjourned.

(MEETING CONCLUDED)