

ASSEMBLY STATE GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE

STATEMENT TO

ASSEMBLY, No. 3771

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: FEBRUARY 14, 2005

The Assembly State Government Committee reports favorably Assembly, No. 3771.

This bill establishes in the Department of State a 29-member New Jersey African-American Reconciliation Study Commission. The bill declares that it is in the interest of the State and the people of New Jersey to establish an African-American Reconciliation Study Commission to examine historical and current conditions affecting African-Americans, to recommend tested means to foster communication and dialogue between African-Americans and other peoples, and to recommend other appropriate means to achieve reconciliation and justice.

The bill, among other things, requires the commission to:

identify the ways by which the State supported the institution of slavery in its constitutional and statutory law, regulations, and judicial decisions;

identify the State-created or supported entities that profited or benefited from commercial involvement with the international and domestic trade of African slaves or from the forced labor of African slaves and their descendants;

identify the ways by which State laws have discriminated against freed African slaves, their descendants and other African-Americans residing in New Jersey, and identify policies and practices, including economic, political and social discrimination by the State and State-created or supported entities, between 1865 and the present;

examine the effects of the institution and legacies of slavery on African-Americans communities in New Jersey;

research methods and materials for facilitating education, community dialogue, symbolic acknowledgment and other formal actions leading toward reconciliation and a sense of justice among the people of this State;

make recommendations for local, county and Statewide actions to follow up the commission's report;

make recommendations for appropriate ways to educate the New Jersey public about the findings and recommendations in the commission's report; and

consider such other matters relating to the institution and legacies of slavery in New Jersey as the members of the commission may deem appropriate.

The members of the commission will include the Secretary of State, the Director of the Division on Civil Rights in the Department of Law and Public Safety, and the Director of the Office of Bias Crimes and Community Relations in the Division of Criminal Justice in the Department of Law and Public Safety, as well as four members of the Senate and four members of the General Assembly. In addition, the Governor will appoint 18 public members, who will include historians, young people, an expert in public health and persons recommended by organizations concerned with the issues of civil rights, human rights, racial, social and economic justice and equality, reparations and other issues concerning the African-American community.

The commission will hold public hearings and is authorized to solicit and receive donations. The commission is to report findings and recommendations to the Governor and Legislature within 16 months of its initial organizational meeting, which is to occur within 60 days of the date the bill becomes law. After the initial report is released, the commission is to provide quarterly reports of its activities and findings to the Governor and the Legislature for the duration of its existence. The commission will be dissolved at the end of the third two-year Legislative term following the Legislative term in which the law is enacted.