



STATE OF ILLINOIS
TORTURE INQUIRY AND RELIEF COMMISSION REGULAR MEETING
Wednesday, May 21, 2025 1:30 p.m.
State of Illinois Building, 555 West Monroe Street, Illinois Room; Chicago, IL

IN-PERSON AND REMOTE-ACCESSIBLE MEETING

MINUTES

PRESENT:

Commissioners Present

Chair Michael Strom
Commissioner Vanessa del Valle
Commissioner Linnet Burden
Commissioner Brian Richardson
Alternate Commissioner Shobha Lakshmi Mahadev
Alternate Commissioner Tameka Walton (via remote)
Alternate Commissioner Sarah Raisch
Alternate Commissioner Naomi Johnson

Commissioners Absent

Commissioner Bennett Kaplan
Commissioner Erica Zunkel
Commissioner Kafi Moragne-Patterson
Commissioner Johanes Maliza
Alternate Commissioner Ivory Snow
Alternate Commissioner Daniel Fenske

Staff Present (some via remote connection)

Aryn Evans (Executive Director)
Jennifer Crespo (General Counsel) - Via Webex
Daniel Thetford
Matthew Haynam
Jerry Wynn
LaWanna Carter
Jenny Huh
William Marino
Silver Scales (via Webex)

Dominique Mabrey
Paola Ascensio
Natanya Pope-Sohel
John Ioakmidis
Victoria Chaves
Stephanie Brown

I. Call to Order/Members Present

On May 21, 2025, at approximately 1:34 p.m., Chair Michael Strom called the meeting of the Illinois Torture Inquiry and Relief Commission (“TIRC” or “Commission”) to order.

Physically present were Chair Michael Strom, Commissioner Linnet Burden, Commissioner Brian Richardson, Commissioner Vanessa del Valle, Alternate Commissioner Sarah Raisch, Alternate Commissioner Naomi Johnson, and Alternate Commissioner Shobha Lakshmi Mahadev comprising physical quorum.

Chair Storm called for a motion to allow Alternate Commissioner Tameka Walton to attend remotely due to unexpected childcare obligations pursuant to Section 7(a)(iv) of the Open Meetings Acts. Commissioner Burden moved to allow Alternate Commissioner Tameka Walton to attend remotely, and Commissioner del Valle seconded the motion. Commissioners voted unanimously to allow Alternate Commissioner Tameka Walton to attend remotely.

The Commissioners present and able to cast binding votes were Chair Strom, Commissioners Burden, del Valle, and Richardson, and Alternate Commissioners Mahadev, Raisch, and Walton.

II. Claims

1. SIMMS, Ahmad (TIRC No. 2014.204-S)

Ahmad Simms’ claim was investigated and analyzed by TIRC’s pro bono team at Kirkland and Ellis including Taylor Donahoe, Seth Cannon, Alexandra Mihalas, Janet Mukherjee, and Jaina Desai and TIRC attorney Jenny Huh. This case was recommended for referral, and Executive Director Evans noted her concurrence with the recommendation. Director Evans noted that TIRC did perform 30-day crime victim notification in this matter and that if any relatives of the victim Susie Irving were present, they would be afforded an opportunity to address the Commission before it reached a decision.

Commissioner Burden asked questions about photographs taken of Simms at his bond hearing and commented on the timeline of Simms’ written statement, the timing of a witness’ affidavit, and the statement made by a codefendant. Chair Strom commented on the timeline of the videotaped confession.

Lawrence Stella Hawkins and the victim's niece were present remotely and spoke on behalf of the victim.

Daryl Simms, Ahmad Simm's uncle, was physically present and spoke on behalf of the Claimant.

This matter was recommended for referral and was so voted to refer by a 6-1 Commissioner vote, with Chair Strom, Commissioner del Valle, Commissioner Richardson, Alternate Commissioner Mahadev, Alternate Commissioner Raisch, and Alternate Commissioner Walton voting to refer and Commissioner Burden voting to no refer.

Director Evans thanked the attorneys from Kirkland and Ellis and TIRC attorney Jenny Huh for their work on this claim.

2. HOUSE, James (TIRC No. 20121.087-H)

James House's claim was investigated and analyzed by TIRC's pro bono team at Kirkland and Ellis including Nick Nielson, Kim Hicks, Mark Schneider, and Mac Laban and TIRC attorney Jenny Huh. This case was not recommended for referral, and Director Evans noted her concurrence with the recommendation. Director Evans noted that TIRC did perform 30-day crime victim notification in this matter and that if any relatives of the victim Isaiah Ewing were present, they would be afforded an opportunity to address the Commission before it reached a decision.

Commissioners discussed the trial strategy and the inconsistencies in the statements made in the claim form compared to the record. Commissioner del Valle asked when the Claimant told his sister about him being beaten. Commissioner Burden commented on the discrepancy between the Claimant's brother's statements to the Commission and the grand jury testimony.

No family members on behalf of the Victim were present.

The Claimant's brother was present remotely and spoke on behalf of the Claimant.

Karen Ranos, attorney for the Claimant, was present remotely and spoke on behalf of the Claimant.

This matter was not recommended for referral but was voted to refer pending a revised written determination to reflect the Commission's decision by a 5-1 Commissioner vote, with Commissioner del Valle, Commissioner Richardson, Alternate Commissioner Mahadev, Alternate Commissioner Raisch, and Alternate Commissioner Walton voting to refer, Chair Strom voting to not refer, and Commissioner Burden abstaining. Alternate Commissioner Johnson cast a nonbinding advisory vote to refer.

Director Evans thanked Kim Hicks of Kirkland and Ellis for presenting the claim.

3. THOMAS, Adrian (TIRC No. 2012.120-T)

Adrian Thomas' claim was investigated and analyzed by TIRC's pro bono team at Kirkland and Ellis including Menaka Nayer, Robert Kimmitt, and Alexandra David and TIRC attorney Jenny Huh. This case was recommended for referral, and Executive Director Evans noted her concurrence with the recommendation. Director Evans noted that TIRC did perform 30-day crime victim notification in this matter and that if any relatives of the victim Denzell Gist were present, they would be afforded an opportunity to address the Commission before it reached a decision.

No family members on behalf of the Victim were present.

No family members on behalf of the Claimant were present.

No attorney on behalf of the Claimant was present.

Commissioner Burden recused herself from voting.

This matter was recommended for referral and was so voted to refer by a 6-0 Commissioner vote, with Chair Strom, Commissioner del Valle, Commissioner Richardson, Alternate Commissioner Mahadev, Alternate Commissioner Raisch, and Alternate Commissioner Walton voting to refer and Alternate Commissioner Johnson casting an advisory vote to refer.

Director Evans thanked Kirkland and Ellis for presenting the claim and TIRC attorney Jenny Huh for her work.

4. EDWARDS, Walter (TIRC No. 2017.494-E)

Walter Edwards' claim was investigated and analyzed by TIRC Supervising Attorney Matthew Haynam. Because this case was a summary dismissal recommendation and did not go to formal inquiry, notification was not required or performed. This case was recommended for summary dismissal and Director Evans noted her concurrence with the recommendation.

Commissioners asked questions about the Claimant's age. Commissioners reviewed the TIRC Act and Administrative Rules. Commissioners and staff discussed the definition of torture, the

Commission's jurisdiction, the Illinois Supreme Court's decision regarding the claim of Darrell Fair, and the status of a conviction integrity unit at the State's Attorney's Office.

This matter was recommended for dismissal, and it was voted to summarily dismiss by a 6-0 Commissioner vote, with Chair Strom, Commissioner del Valle, Commissioner Richardson, Alternate Commissioner Mahadev, Alternate Commissioner Raisch, and Alternate Commissioner Walton voting to dismiss.

Director Evans thanked Matthew Haynam for his work on this claim.

5. HARRIS, Michael (TIRC No. 2013.183-H)

Michael Harris' claim was investigated and analyzed by TIRC attorney Jerry Wynn and supervising attorney Daniel Thetford. This case was recommended for referral, and Executive Director Evans noted her concurrence with the recommendation. Director Evans noted that TIRC did perform 30-day crime victim notification in this matter and that if any relatives of the victim Doylan Greene were present, they would be afforded an opportunity to address the Commission before it reached a decision.

Commissioner Burden asked questions about the parties' motives and the policy on armed interrogations at the time the Claimant was interrogated. Chair Strom discussed motives falsified by law enforcement. Commissioners discussed this Claim's previous recommendation for summary dismissal and the Commissioners' decision to pursue a full inquiry. Commissioners reviewed the definition of torture and how the Commission weighed similar factors from previous claims.

No family members on behalf of the Victim were present.

Lisa Temple, the Claimant's sister, was present and spoke on behalf of the Claimant.

This matter was recommended for referral and was so voted to refer by a 7-0 Commissioner vote, with Chair Strom, Commissioner Burden, Commissioner del Valle, Commissioner Richardson, Alternate Commissioner Mahadev, Alternate Commissioner Raisch, and Alternate Commissioner Walton voting to refer and Alternate Commissioner Johnson casting an advisory vote to refer.

Director Evans thanked Jerry Wynn, Daniel Thetford, and Jennifer Crespo for their work on Michael Harris' claim.

6. PAPALEO, Peter (TIRC No. 2014.218-P)

Peter Papaleo's claim was investigated and analyzed by TIRC attorney Jerry Wynn and supervising attorney Daniel Thetford. This case was not recommended for referral, and Director

Evans noted her concurrence with the recommendation. Director Evans noted that TIRC did perform 30-day crime victim notification in this matter and that if any relatives of the victim were present, they would be afforded an opportunity to address the Commission before it reached a decision.

TIRC's office administrator LaWanna Carter read statements written by the victims and submitted to the Commission, including statements from the child victim, the child victim's mother,

Keith Franson, the Claimant's father-in-law, was present remotely and spoke on behalf of the Claimant.

Commissioners discussed the photographs taken of the Claimant and viewed by TIRC's attorneys as well as the Claimant's medical records from Cermak Hospital.

This matter was not recommended for referral and was so voted to not refer pending the correction of a scrivener's error in the written determination appearing on page 103 of the TIRC 5/21/2025 Commissioner Books by a 7-0 Commissioner vote, with Chair Strom, Commissioner Burden, Commissioner del Valle, Commissioner Richardson, Alternate Commissioner Mahadev, Alternate Commissioner Raisch, and Alternate Commissioner Walton voting to not refer and Alternate Commissioner Johnson casting an advisory vote to not refer.

IV. Executive Director's Report

Executive Director Evans and Jennifer Crespo, General Counsel, testified before Senate and House appropriations committees to support our annual budget request for FY 26 and anticipate that the state's budget will be finalized sometime this month as they close out their session.

Governor appointed new Commissioners Naomi Johnson, Shobha Mahadev, and Sarah Raisch.

Naomi Johnson is Co-Executive Director of Chicago Appleseed Center for Fair Courts. Commissioner Johnson earned their BA in Anthropology from Washington University in St. Louis and received their Master's (AM) from the University of Chicago's Crown Family School of Social Work, Policy, and Practice. Before joining Chicago Appleseed, they worked as the principal researcher and project manager for a community-based participatory research project. Naomi is passionate about issues of racial and economic justice and believes that research is a critical step towards creating more equitable systems. Previously, Naomi was the organizations' Director of Research & Program Management and continues to oversee all research and policy projects – centering community voices alongside evidence-driven approaches.

Shobha Mahadev is a Clinical Professor of Law at the Children and Family Justice Center (CFJC), housed in the Bluhm Legal Clinic at Northwestern. There, she represents adolescents and adults facing trial or convicted for offenses that occurred in their youth, on appeal and in post-conviction and clemency proceedings, and supervises students working on those cases. Commissioner Mahadev also serves as the project director for the Illinois Coalition for the Fair

Sentencing of Children, overseeing policy and litigation strategy with respect to advocating for fair sentencing laws for youth and young adults convicted of serious crimes, where she has contributed to significant reforms of sentencing laws in Illinois and across the country, and co-authored numerous amicus curiae briefs for the U.S. Supreme Court, state supreme courts, and other courts of review. She also authored The Illinois Juvenile Defender Practice Notebook, a training manual for attorneys representing youth in court. Prior to her work at Northwestern, Commissioner Mahadev was a litigation associate at a Chicago-based law firm and an Assistant Defender with the Office of the State Appellate Defender, where she represented indigent clients convicted of criminal offenses on appeal.

Sarah Raisch is a Senior Attorney at Romanucci & Blandin, where she focuses on Civil Rights & Police Misconduct, Sexual Abuse & Hazing, and Medical Malpractice litigation. She is a passionate advocate for fairness, dignity, and human rights in the legal system and her legal career centers on accountability and justice for those harmed by systemic abuse. She represents victims of police brutality, institutional sexual abuse, and mass shootings. Commissioner Raisch brings over a decade of experience as a former public defender, having served as an Assistant Public Defender in Lake County, IL until 2022. She proudly represented clients facing all types of criminal charges and zealously challenged unlawful searches, coerced confessions, and other constitutional violations. She also clerked at the Hennepin County Public Defender's Office in Minneapolis during law school. Her background gives her a deep understanding of the power imbalances and failures within the criminal justice system, especially affecting marginalized communities. Sarah is a mother of twins, an Ironman triathlete, and a "Double-Badger" having attended the University of Wisconsin for both college and law school.

Director Evans will propose resolutions at a subsequent meeting to thank outgoing commissioners Steven Block and Sheila Bedi.

V. Public Comment

Mark Clements was present and offered public comment regarding Stan Willis. Dr. Vicki Casanova Willis was present and offered public comment about Stan Willis and thanks to the Commission.

VI. Adjournment

Chair Strom called for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner del Valle moved to adjourn the meeting and Alternate Commissioner Raisch seconded. Commissioner Richardson left the meeting prior to the Executive Director's report and did not vote to adjourn. Commissioners voted unanimously to adjourn, and the meeting adjourned at approximately 4:55 PM. The next meeting will be held on July 23, 2025 at 1:30 PM.