



**STATE OF ILLINOIS
TORTURE INQUIRY AND RELIEF COMMISSION REGULAR MEETING
Wednesday, July 23, 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 Bennett Kaplan
Commissioner Erica Zunkel
Commissioner Johanes Maliza
Commissioner Kafi Moragne-Patterson
Alternate Commissioner Shobha Lakshmi Mahadev
Alternate Commissioner Tameka Walton
Alternate Commissioner Sarah Raisch
Alternate Commissioner Naomi Johnson
Alternate Commissioner Ivory Snow

Commissioners Absent

Commissioner Brian Richardson
Alternate Commissioner Daniel Fenske

Staff Present (*some via remote connection*)

Aryn Evans (Executive Director)
Jennifer Crespo (General Counsel)
Daniel Thetford
Matthew Haynam
Jerry Wynn
LaWanna Carter
William Marino
Silver Scales (via Webex)
Dominique Mabrey
Paola Ascencio
Natanya Pope-Sohel
John Ioakimidis
Stephanie Brown

I. Call to Order/Members Present

On July 23, 2025, at approximately 1:37 p.m., Chair Michael Strom called the meeting of the Illinois Torture Inquiry and Relief Commission (“TIRC” or “Commission”) to order.

Physically present and comprising quorum were Chair Michael Strom, Commissioner Bennett Kaplan, Commissioner Johanes Maliza, Commissioner Linnet Burden, Commissioner Vanessa del Valle, Commissioner Erica Zunkel, Commissioner Kafi Moragne-Patterson, Alternate Commissioner Tameka Walton, Alternate Commissioner Sarah Raisch, Alternate Commissioner Naomi Johnson, and Alternate Commissioner Shobha Lakshmi Mahadev. Alternate Commissioner Ivory Snow joined the meeting at 2:22 PM.

The Commissioners present and able to cast binding votes were Chair Michael Strom, Commissioner Bennett Kaplan, Commissioner Johanes Maliza, Commissioner Linnet Burden, Commissioner Vanessa del Valle, Commissioner Erica Zunkel, Commissioner Kafi Moragne-Patterson, and Alternate Commissioner Tameka Walton.

II. Claims

1. FLUKER, Miguel (TIRC No. 2014.228-M)

Mr. Fluker’s claim was investigated and analyzed by the pro bono team at Kirkland and Ellis with the assistance of Chief Investigative Attorney Matthew Haynam who presented this matter to the Commission and Executive Director Evans noted her concurrence with his recommendation. Director Evans noted that TIRC did perform 30-day crime victim notification in this matter and that if any relatives of the victim, Jesse Hudson, were present they would be afforded an opportunity to address the Commission before it reached a decision.

Chair Strom had questions regarding Mr. Fluker’s proximity to the crime and the physical evidence. Commissioner Burden had questions regarding Mr. Fluker’s signed written confession. Mr. Fluker explained that at the time he was interrogated he could not read or write. Commissioner Burden further questioned Mr. Fluker regarding a witness named Simmons who was not present at the crime scene and questioned what testimony that witness could provide and what weight could be given to that testimony. Attorney Haynam addressed Commissioner Burden’s questions and provided insight as to the reliability of Simmons’ testimony.

No relatives of the victim were present.

Miguel Fluker was present and spoke on his own behalf.

This matter was recommended for referral for further judicial review, and it was voted to refer by an 8-0 Commissioner vote with Chair Michael Strom, Commissioner Bennett Kaplan, Commissioner Johanes Maliza, Commissioner Linnet Burden, Commissioner Vanessa del Valle, Commissioner Erica Zunkel, Commissioner Kafi Moragne-Patterson, and Alternate Commissioner Tameka Walton voting to refer. Alternate Commissioner Sarah Raisch recused herself from the voting. Alternate Commissioner Naomi Johnson and Alternate Commissioner Shobha Lakshmi Mahadev casted non-binding advisory votes to refer.

Director Evans thanked the attorneys of the law firm Kirkland & Ellis and Chief Investigative Attorney Haynam for their work on this claim.

2. THAMES, Linord (TIRC No. 2016.347-T)

Mr. Thames' claim was investigated and analyzed by the TIRC Chief Investigative Attorney Matthew Haynam who presented this matter to the Commission. Executive Director Evans noted her concurrence with their recommendation and noted that TIRC did perform 30-day crime victim notification in this matter and that if any relatives of the victim, Quinton Kirkwood, were present they would be afforded an opportunity to address the Commission before it reached a decision.

A proposal to summarily dismiss the matter was made as there was no initial finding of torture alleged by Mr. Thames to illicit his confession, which Director Evans indicates presented a jurisdictional issue because Mr. Thames' claims do not rise to the level of review under the definition of the Act.

Katie Kirkwood and Matthew Mohammed were present as family members on behalf of the victim.

Claimant Linord Thames was present and spoke on his own behalf.

Nelson Carter, a friend of the Claimant, also spoke on behalf of the Claimant.

Chair Strom had questions about the procedures used by police and noted distinctions between two separate confinements involving the claimant. Commissioner Kaplan had questions on the legitimacy of the claim. Commissioner Mahadev had questions regarding the claims raised during the Claimant's interview with TIRC and what was noted in the Claimant's form requesting inquiry by the Commission. Alternate Commissioner Raisch had questions regarding the second trial and the Claimant's polygraph test.

Commissioner del Valle had questions regarding the Claimant's cognitive abilities. She also had questions regarding sleep deprivation, sleeping on a floor, and deprivation of food and water. She further requested clarification on the length of time the claimant volunteered to be questioned by police and whether promises of leniency rise to the level of psychological torture. Commissioner Burden had questions regarding whether the Claimant's written statement inquiring whether his statement qualified as a confession or a witness statement.

Commissioner Moragne-Patterson had questions regarding the Claimant's cognitive skills and his age, being held in a room not intended for sleep, and the complaint histories of the involved officers. She further questioned the impact of the offer of leniency on the Claimant and his confession. Alternate Commissioner Johnson had a question about the interview door being locked and the Claimant not being able leave.

Director Evans reminds the Commission that the charges involving felony murder are not limited to those who physically commit the act of the crime but involve those who were also present at the scene of the crime. Commissioner Mahadev questions about how this impacts a confession by an actor versus a witness to a crime. Chair Strom noted the police officer's willingness to release the Claimant during the first confinement. Commissioner Maliza asserted that it seems the claim requires further inquiry as to the circumstances surrounding the Claimant's confession.

This matter was recommended for summary dismissal but was unanimously voted to not summarily dismiss with Chair Michael Strom, Commissioner Bennett Kaplan, Commissioner Johannes Maliza, Commissioner Linnet Burden, Commissioner Vanessa del Valle, Commissioner Erica Zunkel, Commissioner Kafi Moragne-Patterson, and Alternate Commissioner Tameka Walton voting to not summarily dismiss the claim. Alternate Commissioner Johnson and Alternate Commissioner Snow casted non-binding advisory votes to not dismiss.

Director Evans noted that the Claim would proceed to formal inquiry and thanked Chief Investigative Attorney Haynam for his work on this claim.

3. HOUSE, James (TIRC No. 2011.087-H)

Mr. House's claim was investigated and analyzed by Chief Investigative Attorney Daniel Thetford who presented this matter to the Commission 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 Isaiah Ewing were present, they would be afforded an opportunity to address the Commission before it reached a decision.

No family members were present on behalf of the victim.

Cornelius Aaron and Jacqueline Aaron were present by phone on behalf of the Claimant but did not speak.

Commissioners Maliza and Mahadev discussed the differences between physical abuse and psychological abuse and whether those distinctions are defined in the Act or have an impact on subsequent judicial review.

Chair Strom had procedural questions following the Commission's previous decision during the May session and thanked the Commissioners for giving these matters the attention they deserve.

This matter was recommended for referral for further judicial review, and it was so voted to refer by a 7-1 Commissioner vote with Chair Michael Strom, Commissioner Bennett Kaplan, Commissioner Johannes Maliza, Commissioner Vanessa del Valle, Commissioner Erica Zunkel, Commissioner Kafi Moragne-Patterson, and Alternate Commissioner Tameka Walton voting to refer and Commissioner Linnet Burden voting not to refer. Alternate Commissioner Johnson, Alternate Commissioner Shobha Lakshmi Mahadev, Alternate Commissioner Snow, and Alternate Commissioner Raisch casted a non-binding advisory votes to refer.

Director Evans thanked Chief Investigative Attorney Thetford for his work on the Claim.

4. BARNES, Udell (TIRC No. 2013.132-B)

Mr. Barnes' claim was investigated and analyzed by TIRC Staff and Chief Investigate Attorney Matthew Haynam who presented this matter to the Commission, and Executive Director Evans noted her concurrence with their recommendation. Director Evans noted that TIRC did perform 30-day crime victim notification in this matter and that if any relatives of the victim Gregory McWilliams were present, they would be afforded an opportunity to address the Commission before it reached a decision.

No family members were present on behalf of the victim.

No family members were present on behalf of the Claimant.

Chair Strom had questions regarding the Claimant's statement and about the IQ of Claimant, as well as his previous skull injury. Commissioner Kaplan had a question regarding the Claimant's statement to Ms. Thompson and the Claimant's confession. Commissioner Burden had a question regarding Ms. Thompson's statement being suppressed and whether additional evidence existed to otherwise convict Mr. Barnes.

This matter was recommended for referral for further judicial review and it was so voted to refer by a 8-0 Commissioner vote with Chair Michael Strom, Commissioner Bennett Kaplan, Commissioner Johanes Maliza, Commissioner Linnet Burden, Commissioner Vanessa del Valle, Commissioner Erica Zunkel, Commissioner Kafi Moragne-Patterson, and Alternate Commissioner Tameka Walton voting to refer. Alternate Commissioner Shobha Lakshmi Mahadev, Alternative Commissioner Naomi Johnson, Alternate Commissioner Ivory Snow, and Alternative Commissioner Sarah Raisch casted non-binding advisory votes to refer.

Director Evans thanked Chief Investigative Attorney Haynam for his work on the Claim.

5. UPSHAW, Ezra (TIRC No. 2016.317-U)

Mr. Upshaw's claim was investigated and analyzed by the TIRC Chief Investigative Attorney Matthew Haynam who presented this matter to the Commission for summary dismissal due to the death of the claimant, and Executive Director Evans noted her concurrence with the recommendation. Director Evans noted that this summary dismissal recommendation did not go to formal inquiry and, therefore, no notification was required or performed.

This matter was recommended for summary dismissal, and it was voted to summarily dismiss by an 8-0 Commissioner vote with Chair Michael Strom, Commissioner Bennett Kaplan, Commissioner Johanes Maliza, Commissioner Linnet Burden, Commissioner Vanessa del Valle, Commissioner Erica Zunkel, Commissioner Kafi Moragne-Patterson, and Alternate Commissioner Tameka Walton voting to summarily dismiss.

Director Evans thanked Chief Investigative Attorney Haynam for his work on the Claim.

III. Review and Approval of Minutes from March 19, 2025 Open Session and the May 21, 2025 Open Session

Commissioner del Valle moved to approve the March 19, 2025 Open Session Minutes and Commissioner Moragne-Patterson seconded the Motion. Commissioners voted unanimously to approve the March 19, 2025 Meeting Minutes.

Commissioner del Valle moved to approve the May 21, 2025 Open Session Minutes and Alternate Commissioner Johnson seconded the Motion. Commissioners voted unanimously to approve the May 21, 2025 Meeting Minutes.

IV. Executive Director's Report

General Counsel Jennifer Crespo provided Commissioners with the final results of the Auditor General's Report for the period ending June 30, 2023. General Counsel Crespo updated Commissioners on final judgments entered in litigation affecting TIRC in the Illinois Supreme

Court and Appellate Court. General Counsel Crespo reviewed the State of Illinois Revolving Door Prohibition Policy and asked Commissioners and Director Evans to execute their written acknowledgments of the policy.

Director Evans reviewed the September Commission Meeting schedule with Commissioners and polled Commissioners for their availability.

V. Public Comment

No public comment was offered by members of the public in attendance.

VI. Closed Session to Discuss Litigation Affecting the Commission Pursuant to Section 2(c)(11) of the Open Meetings Act

General Counsel Jennifer Crespo advised the Commission it would need to discuss pending litigation affecting the Commission in Closed Session pursuant to section 2(c)(11) of the Open Meetings Act. Commissioner Zunkel moved and Commissioner Kaplan seconded. Commissioners voted unanimously to go into Closed Session.

VII. Return to Open Session

Chair Strom requested a motion to return to Open Session. Commissioner del Valle moved to return to Open Session and Commissioner Maliza seconded the motion. Commissioners voted unanimously to return to Open Session and the Commission returned to Open Session at approximately 4:30 p.m.

VIII. Adjournment

Chair Strom called for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner del Valle moved to adjourn the meeting and Commissioner Maliza seconded. Commissioners voted unanimously to adjourn at approximately 4:33 p.m. The next meeting will be held on September 17, 2025 at 1:30 p.m. with a possible change to September 24, 2025 at 1:30 p.m.