



October 26, 2021

Councilor Julia Mejia, Chair  
City Council Committee on Civil Rights  
Boston City Council  
City Hall, 5th Floor  
Boston, MA 02201

Re: Docket #0734

Chairwoman Mejia, Councilor Bok, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on this important topic. My name is Katie Sandson and I am an attorney and Director of the Racial Redress and Reparations Lab at the Civil Rights and Restorative Justice Project (CRRJ).

Based at Northeastern University School of Law, CRRJ is a mission-driven program of interdisciplinary teaching, research and policy analysis on race, history, and criminal justice. The program is the preeminent academic center for the study of historical redress in the United States. Our investigations and scholarship facilitate local and national initiatives to uncover an accurate history of racial harms during the Jim Crow era and reconcile the ongoing damage. CRRJ's Racial Redress and Reparations Lab offers expertise in designing reparative processes, historical and legal research, and convening assistance.

CRRJ's investigations document a pattern of racial violence and oppression that persisted long after the abolition of slavery. CRRJ has identified and investigated over 500 cases of racially motivated homicide in the Jim Crow South.<sup>i</sup> CRRJ's work also documents the ongoing legacies of historical racial harms. The history of state-sanctioned violence and oppression against African Americans—from slavery to the Jim Crow era and continuing today in forms such as mass incarceration and police brutality—is a shared history with continuing societal impacts. Families today are still affected by the loss of accumulated wealth, land, and job and educational opportunities. Many are also still affected by historical and intergenerational trauma, which can be passed from generation to generation through “physiological, environmental, and social pathways.”<sup>ii</sup>

Although CRRJ's investigations focus primarily on the Southern and border states, this history has a national impact. During the Great Migration, over six million African Americans relocated from the South to Northern cities from 1916 through the 1970s.<sup>iii</sup> Migrating families hoped the North would provide a safe refuge from the murder, violence, segregation, and harassment that they had experienced in the South. However, many continued to experience patterns of violence and oppression in the North.

Boston, like all cities, has its own history of racial violence, police brutality, and inequity in the legal and criminal justice systems. *Confronting Racial Injustice*, a project of the Criminal Justice Task Force and hosted by the Massachusetts Historical Society, is just one of many existing efforts to document this local history. This project explored historical events in Massachusetts in order to probe how slavery, racism, and their legacies have influenced and continue to influence our legal and governmental institutions.<sup>iv</sup>

These historical and continuing harms demand repair. Our legal and governmental institutions played a central role in these harms, and must also play a central role in reparative efforts. We are pleased to see the City of Boston join a growing number of state and local governments exploring restitution and reparations. We urge the City to proceed with a comprehensive process, informed by the voices of the communities most affected, to investigate and document its history and take steps towards repair.

Cities across the country now provide a range of models from which Boston can glean important lessons. Examples include, but are not limited to: Providence, Rhode Island's Truth-Telling, Reconciliation, and Reparations process, which released an initial truth-telling report in March 2021<sup>v</sup>; Evanston, Illinois's reparations process, including the creation of its Reparations Committee and the launch of its Restorative Housing Program, which provides home ownership and home improvement grants<sup>vi</sup>; and the commissions and task forces being appointed to develop reparations proposals in San Francisco, California,<sup>vii</sup> Asheville, North Carolina,<sup>viii</sup> and Amherst, Massachusetts<sup>ix</sup>.

Compiling a full accounting of the wrongs committed, and of the role of local government and institutions, is an essential first step towards repair. We hope that the City of Boston will build on this initial hearing and continue to probe not only the City's history with slavery, but also the systemic racism and discriminatory policies and practices that continued for decades after, and the ongoing legacies of these practices.

Thank you for your time and for your attention to this important topic.

Testimony Submitted by:

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<sup>i</sup> See *Burnham Nobles Archive Reading Room*, CIVIL RIGHTS & RESTORATIVE JUSTICE PROJECT, <https://crrj.org/reading-room/> for examples of these case investigations.

<sup>ii</sup> See, e.g., Michelle M. Sotero, *A Conceptual Model of Historical Trauma: Implications for Public Health Practice and Research*, 1 J. HEALTH DISPARITIES RESEARCH & PRACTICE 93, 95, 100 (2006).

<sup>iii</sup> See Isabel Wilkerson, *The Long-Lasting Legacy of the Great Migration*, SMITHSONIAN MAGAZINE (Sept. 2016), <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/long-lasting-legacy-great-migration-180960118/>.

<sup>iv</sup> *Confronting Racial Injustice & Historical Narratives*, CIVIL RIGHTS & RESTORATIVE JUSTICE PROJECT, <https://crrj.org/taskforce/>.

<sup>v</sup> Executive Order 2020-13, Declaration on Truth, Reconciliation, Reparations

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(Providence, RI, July 15, 2020), <https://www.providenceri.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Mayors-Executive-Order-2020-13-1.pdf>; RHODE ISLAND BLACK HERITAGE SOCIETY & 1696 HERITAGE GROUP, *A MATTER OF TRUTH: THE STRUGGLE FOR AFRICAN HERITAGE & INDIGENOUS PEOPLE EQUAL RIGHTS IN PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND (1620-2020)* (2021), <https://aaagpvd.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/UPDATED-Matter-of-Truth2.pdf>.

<sup>vi</sup> *Evanston Local Reparations*, CITY OF EVANSTON, <https://www.cityofevanston.org/government/city-council/reparations> (last visited Oct. 25, 2021).

<sup>vii</sup> Ordinance 259-20, Establishing African American Reparations Advisory Committee (San Francisco Board of Supervisors 2020), <https://sfbos.org/sites/default/files/o0259-20.pdf>.

<sup>viii</sup> *Reparations*, CITY OF ASHEVILLE, <https://www.publicinput.com/avlreparations> (last visited Oct. 25, 2021).

<sup>ix</sup> *African Heritage Reparation Assembly*, AMHERST MASSACHUSETTS, <https://www.amherstma.gov/3625/African-Heritage-Reparation-Assembly> (last visited Oct. 25, 2021).