



***Governor's Commission on Caribbean Affairs***  
***Strategic Planning Session (SPS-I) Meeting***

*Virtual ZOOM*  
*Thursday, January 22, 2026*  
*6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.*

**Meeting Minutes**

**Commissioners in Attendance:**

**Ken Alce, Member**  
**Dr. Melissa Buckley, Member**  
**Gabriel Christian, Member**  
**Jemima Davis, Member**  
**Samantha Howard, Vice Chair**  
**Dr. Maxine Kellman, Member**  
**Winsome Leslie, Member**  
**Cylia Lowe, Member**  
**Ambassador Luis McSween, Chair**  
**Habacuc Petion, Member**  
**Dr. Elaine Simon, Member**

**Commissioners Absent:**

**Anderson Jean, Member**  
**Dr. Carla Sewer, Member**  
**Kasandra Tucker, Member**

**GOCI Staff:** Silvia Decja, Administrative Director - GOCI  
 Cheryl Madigan, Executive Assistant - GOCI

**I. Call to Order:**

*Luis McSween, Chair* – Meeting called to order at 6:03 p.m.

**II. Prayer:**

*Commissioner Jemima Davis graced us with a prayer.*

**III. Opening Remarks:**

- ❖ Chair Ambassador Luis McSween welcomed everyone. He spoke on the passing of the commission's previous chair, Ambassador Curtis Ward. He asked the commission to honor him by building a commission that is responsive, engaged, impactful, and one that reflects the vibrancy and resilience of the Caribbean diaspora.
- ❖ Administrative Director, Silvia Decja expressed her concerns about the struggles that the communities have gone through last year. She is looking forward to what the commission is going to bring this year. She reminded the commission of the upcoming event for the passing of Ambassador Curtis Ward.

**IV. Motions: Approval of Minutes:**

Motion	1st	2nd	Vote
Approval of the 12/04/2025 Minutes	Winsome Leslie	Jemima Davis	9Y-0N-0A



**V. Governor’s Moore/Miller Administration Top 10 Priorities Discussion:**

AD Decja provided information on the results of the previous survey. The commission requested to complete a new survey. The survey is to be completed by January 31, 2026.

**VI. Mission & Vision Statements:**

Commissioner Gabriel Christian proposed the following statements.

❖ **Mission Statement**

The Maryland Governor’s Commission on Caribbean Affairs serves as a trusted advisory body to the Governor and State agencies, advancing policies, partnerships, and programs that promote the civic, economic, educational, and cultural well-being of Maryland’s Caribbean community. The Commission works to amplify Caribbean voices, strengthen diaspora engagement, and foster inclusive growth that benefits both Maryland and the Caribbean region.

❖ **Vision Statement**

We envision a Maryland where Caribbean heritage is fully recognized as a vital force in the State’s prosperity, where Caribbean-American communities thrive across generations, and where Maryland stands as a national model for meaningful diaspora engagement, cultural respect, and global partnership with the Caribbean.

**Motions: Approval of Mission & Vision Statements:**

Motion	1st	2nd	Vote
Approval of the Mission & Vision Statements	Winsome Leslie	Jemima Davis	9Y-0N-1A

**VII. Committees (Community (Arts-Culture-Faith), Business & Economic Development, Education & Workforce Development, and Health):**

Chair McSween and EA Madigan went over the committee spreadsheet and asked all commissioners what committee they wish to serve on and Chair McSween chose the Chairs for each committee.

**VIII. Working Groups:**

- a) **Maryland Caribbean Voices Forum:** Commissioner Melissa Buckley will email the commission to see who would like to join this working group. Chair McSween would like to have confirmed details of this event by the end of March.
- b) **Maryland 250 Commission: This task doesn’t need to be a festival, celebration or parade, it can be a project.** AD Decja spoke about that events can be throughout the year. She will check to see if Maryland is planning any events. Chair McSween, Commissioner Davis Commissioner Petiton, Commissioner Simon and Vice Chair Howard spoke of event possibilities.
  - i. Multi-culture event, which could be combined with the Heritage Month Celebration.
  - ii. An event to invite the community for a contest.
  - iii. To partner with the State of Maryland event, if there is an event already being planned.
  - iv. Partner with Maryland State Archives where the commissioner will provide their stories.

**Motions: To table the MD250 Discussion:**

Motion	1st	2nd	Vote
Approval to table the MD250 Discussion	Melissa Buckley	Ken Alce	10Y-0N-0A



- c) **Caribbean Heritage Month:** There was discussion about planning this event for the month of August. The commission needs to start planning for this event, or any other event at least 180 days prior to the event date. All fundraising/sponsorship funds must be in the States hands 30 days prior to the date of the event. If the main finance department (GOFA) does not have all of the funds in hand by the 30-day deadline, GOCI upper management has the authority to cancel the event. In-kind sponsorships will still need to meet the same deadlines.

**Motions: To Create a Working Group for a Business Roundtable Event under Business/Economic Development Committee:**

Motion	1st	2nd	Vote
Approval of the Working Group for the Business Roundtable Event	Ken Alce	Maxine Kellman	10Y-0N-0A

**IX. By-laws Discussion:**

**Motions: To table the By-laws Discussion:**

Motion	1st	2nd	Vote
Approval to table the Bylaws Discussion	VC Samantha Howard	Maxine Kellman	10Y-0N-0A

**X. Motions: Adjourning of the Meeting:**

Motion	1st	2nd	Vote
Adjournment of meeting at 7:43 p.m.	Ken Alce	Jemima Davis	9Y-0N-0A