

# REEMGVL

GREENVILLE RACIAL EQUITY +  
ECONOMIC MOBILITY COMMISSION

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**SUMMARY REPORT TO THE COMMUNITY**

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# WHY REEM? WHY NOW?

On June 1, 2020, the Greenville Chamber of Commerce, Urban League of the Upstate and United Way of Greenville County released a statement in response to the horrifying events taking place in the country. While the incidents and related reactions as a result of the violent murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery were startling, they unfortunately are only the most recent of many similar tragedies that have transpired in our country over the past 400 years.

Greenville County, and especially the City of Greenville, is thriving – but not for all residents. **Greenville County is worse than almost every county in the nation for helping poor and minority children** out of poverty and up the economic mobility ladder.

This leaves Greenville County at a critical juncture. Recognizing that communities can only reach their full economic potential by resolving race-based disparities, leaders from these three institutions collaborated on a call to action for our community to ensure positive change is created within the Black community. Together, the Greenville Chamber, Urban League of the Upstate, and United Way of Greenville County quickly realized it would be necessary to lead the charge by convening the county-wide Racial Equity and Economic Mobility (REEM) Commission in August 2020 to discuss the current state of Greenville County, S.C., and move aggressively toward influencing solutions to ensure that Black residents have unobstructed opportunities for safety, justice and opportunities for success – regardless of their race.

## WHAT IS “DATA DRIVEN”?

The REEM Commission leverages United Way of Greenville County’s Racial Equity Index to identify and address key racial inequities and social justice issues within Greenville County, particularly regarding the Black community. This information helps the Commission understand and address root causes of the issues. The study showed there are significant inequities in economic mobility across racial groups, evident across most domains – including health, criminal justice, income and wealth, and education.

This study demonstrates that Black residents fare worse than white residents in Greenville County on multiple measures and lack systems for economic mobility such as residential segregation, education, transportation, and income. Black household income is 56% of white household income. This is worse than the state and U.S. averages, and

the trend is not improving. The gap is even wider in the City of Greenville. Female and Black residents have higher poverty rates compared to male and white residents, and 22.5% of Black children live in areas of concentrated poverty, compared to 4.8% of white children.

**IN GREENVILLE COUNTY,  
BLACK HOUSEHOLD INCOME  
IS 56% OF WHITE  
HOUSEHOLD INCOME.**

## REEM COMMISSION’S LEADERSHIP

In response to these data points around local racial disparities, paired with our collective national reckoning, the REEM Commission was formed. **Co-chaired by David Lominack and Judge Merl Code, the REEM leadership team ensured that a diverse group of 35 commissioners were selected** to serve, representing a variety of industries including local government, education, law enforcement, the faith community, philanthropy, corporations, grassroots leaders and activists, and healthcare. These community leaders work collaboratively to develop systems-level strategies and implement significant change in the areas of racial inequities,

social justice and other key gaps. Dozens of others have served on committees to shape the recommendations. With over 150 convened meetings and 250+ hours invested in the critical work at hand, the Commission also spent countless hours connecting with the broader business, civic and faith community to support our efforts.

In April of 2022, **pastor and community leader Stacey Mills was hired to serve as the initiative’s executive director.** Mills will work to advance the Commission’s mission and guide the actionable recommendations brought forth by the commissioners.

## THE PHASES OF REEM

Throughout the process, the Commission grounded itself in the mission to develop strategies and partnerships that eradicate race-based disparities and inequities impacting the Black community in Greenville County, and our vision of a Greenville County where racial equity is absolute, and prosperity is accessible for all in the Black community.

The work of the REEM Commission to date and beyond includes a multi-phased action plan:

**PHASE 1: Infrastructure Development (August 2020 – January 2021):** This phase included initial data analysis, identification of core focus areas, establishment of the REEM Commission’s approach, and selection of commissioners and committee members.

**PHASE 2: Learning and Recommendation Development (February 2021 – November 2021):** During this phase, commissioners and committee members engaged in learning opportunities regarding racial inequities, both broadly and within each focus area, gained support of subject matter experts and community focus groups, developed and refined draft recommendations, and enhanced community awareness of the REEM Commission, its work, and the importance of racial equity in Greenville County.

**PHASE 3: Implementation and Sustainability (2022):** This phase will include community conversations, surveying, and continuous engagement intended to prioritize and refine initial recommendations with additional insight and participation from the Black community. The Greenville Chamber, Urban League and United Way will continue its collective leadership of REEM, with United Way acting as the backbone organization to provide ongoing support of REEM’s mission. Stacey Mills was hired as executive director to lead the initiative’s work on a daily basis, to be followed by the establishment of a formal structure of governance.

# SUMMARY REPORT TO THE COMMUNITY



## OUR LEARNING JOURNEY

As the REEM Commission embarked upon this work, a critical component was to learn from other communities that had been engaged in race equity work for some time, often inspired by a crisis in their own community. Connections were made with leaders from Charleston, Tulsa, Buffalo, and Ferguson to name a few. Commissioners and other community leaders deepened their knowledge regarding racial inequities, including participating in a 21 Day Equity Challenge and attending the Racial Equity Institute's Groundwater Institute.

Additionally, recognizing that engaging the Black community is crucial to the success of the REEM Commission, several community conversations were hosted in Phase 1, and as the Commission launches Phase 3, a deeper engagement of the Black community is planned.

**From its beginning in September 2020, the Commission has accomplished the following:**

- Step Up to the Plate Racial Equity Event: The REEM Commission hosted a free community event in partnership with the Greenville Drive featuring Black vendors and a chance to meet the REEM founders and commissioners. The afternoon also featured a special presentation of "Vision & Justice: Race, Citizenship and America" with Sarah Elizabeth Lewis, Harvard University Associate Professor and author of "The Rise."
- Initiated and fostered opportunities for speaking engagements hosted by local philanthropic and community stakeholders, heightened visibility of the Commission's mission and work through a variety of different media outlets, and targeted community-led conversations with key audiences.
- Conducted Racial Healing Circles to heal and transform by positioning honor and value for an individual's humanity and to foster relationships built on respect that won't be divided by racial and ethnic lines.
- Provided learning opportunities for commissioners and sub-committee members including Racial Equity Institute's Groundwater training, lunch and learns, and assessing Greenville's history of racial inequity.
- Developed an initial set of recommendations for each of the focus areas aimed to address racial inequity by developing and leveraging partnerships, initiatives and advocacy efforts.

The following REEM Commission recommendations, presented here in summary form, are the result of several months of hard work by commissioners and committee members. The intent was to set bold, clear and actionable goals in each of the key focus areas. As the REEM Commission moves into Phase 3, the goals will continue to be refined and benchmarked, while also developing action plans with tactics developed to achieve them.

## COMMUNITY-WIDE LEARNING: RECOMMENDATIONS

Co-chairs: Katy Smith, Greenville Partnership for Philanthropy + Tamela Spann, Hollingsworth Funds  
Facilitator: Dr. Kirsten Naomi Chapman, United Way of Greenville County

### GOALS

- 1 Cultivate a safe and welcoming community that promotes conversation and curiosity around the issue of racial equity
- 2 Build residents' understanding and empathy with others' experiences
- 3 Provide a wide variety of learning opportunities for individuals with various levels of understanding of the issue
- 4 Encourage an inclusive culture that is reflective of our community's diversity
- 5 Enhance conditions for systems' change through a better understanding of the Black experience

### POSSIBLE ACTIONS

- Partner with My Neighbor's Voice to host community conversations
- Support Art of Conversation in developing retreats for workplaces
- Create a local leader video series
- Host community-wide learning events
- Develop an experiential game focused on Greenville's history of race and economic mobility
- Send leaders through the Racial Equity Institute's trainings
- Ensure events and celebrations in Greenville County include promotion and inclusion of Black culture

Community-Wide Learning Committee: Nicole Andrews, McMillan Pazdan Smith | Kennedy Brown, Youth Advocate | Victoria Chance, My Neighbor's Voice | Jeremiah Dew, It's J.Dew | Megan Dodgens, Riley Institute | Jalen Elrod, Community Advocate | Julio Hernandez, Clemson University | Robert Hughes, Hughes Development | Butch Kirven, Greenville County Council | Charnise Mangle, GSSM | Jonathan Parker, Art of the Conversation | Kennedy Peterson, ScanSource | Rhonda Rawlings, Uplift Upstate | Catherine Schumacher, Public Education Partners | Jessica Sharp, Sharp Brain Consulting | Susan Stall, Village Engage | Ellen Stevenson, Community Remembrance Project | Lamont Sullivan, North Greenville University | Wendy Walden, Greenville Technical College

## CRIMINAL JUSTICE: RECOMMENDATIONS

*Co-chairs: Dr. Karen Baynes-Dunning, Baynes-Dunning Consulting + Chief Howie Thompson, Greenville Police Department  
Facilitator: Alesia Rico Flores, Root and Rebound*

- 1 Expand, support, and create robust expungement, diversion, and reentry programs to reduce recidivism, promote equality, and increase economic mobility.
- 2 Continue with de-incarceration efforts, recruit Black law enforcement officers, form citizen review boards, and create a criminal justice coordinating council to increase public trust and mitigate the disparate impact of the criminal justice system on the Black community.
- 3 Address the disparities within the education system through the analysis of data related to academic placement and disciplinary practices, and incorporate implicit bias training to improve outcomes for Black students.
- 4 Prevention and intervention are key components to creating positive outcomes for Black youth. Proactively preventing and intervening requires a strong infrastructure of dedicated community leaders and organizations to create and support sustainable youth programs which keep youth on track for success.

*Criminal Justice Committee: April Barksdale | Jerry Blassingame, Soteria | Craig Brown, Greenville Drive | Captain Cheryl Cromartie, Greenville County Sheriff's Office | Traci Fant, Freedom Fighters Upstate Foundation | Rev. J.M. Flemming, NAACP Greenville | Sheriff Hobart Lewis, Greenville County Sheriff's Office | Conrad Mansell, Greenville County Sheriff's Office | Meghan McDaniel, Fostering Great Ideas | Chris Scalzo, 13th Circuit Public Defender's Office | Dr. Angelia Turner, Spartanburg Methodist College | Karry Walker, Retired Officer | Walt Wilkins, 13th Circuit Solicitor's Office | Sam Zimmerman, NAACP Greenville*

## EDUCATION: RECOMMENDATIONS

*Co-chairs: Dr. Elizabeth Davis, Furman University + Stacey Mills, USC Upstate  
Facilitators: Dr. Christen Hairston, Prisma Health, and Dee Dee Washington, Anderson University*

- 1 Eliminate educational disparities that negatively impact Black students in our community by supporting best-practice programs that address gaps from early childhood to higher education, including childcare, literacy, mentorship, advising and more.
- 2 Expand community-wide parent support structures and services that improve birth outcomes and highly benefit the Black community at every level of the education spectrum.
- 3 Increase equitable access to educational services that help students graduate from high school on time with college credit and/or industry certification.
- 4 Advance and advocate for educational policy initiatives that positively impact Black students in our community, including budget allocations, testing, financial aid programs, and teacher training and recruitment.

*Education Committee: Dr. Edward Anderson, OnTrack Greenville | Whitney Hanna, Greenville County Schools | Derek Lewis, Greenville First Steps | Dr. Keith Miller, Greenville Technical College | Susan Orr, Prisma Health | Jason Richards, NAI Earle Furman | Dr. Burke Royster, Greenville County Schools | Liz Seman, Furman University | Minor Shaw, Micco LLC | Dr. Baxter Wynn, United Ministries*

## HEALTH & WELLNESS: RECOMMENDATIONS

*Co-chairs: Dr. Shaniece Criss, Furman University & Travelers Rest City Council + Deb Long, Bon Secours St. Francis Health System | Facilitator: Addy Matney, TM Public Relations and Governmental Affairs*

- 1 Advocate for the expansion of Medicaid in South Carolina.
- 2 Normalize representation in recruiting, hiring and retaining health care professionals, and increase cultural competencies among all health professionals.
- 3 Increase access to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and increase quality of the benefits offered through the program.
- 4 Increase access to perinatal care and increase access to birth control, through clinical care, community engagement, and policy.
- 5 Increase access to mental health services for children and adults.

*Health & Wellness Committee: Peggy Baxter, Community Advocate | Matt Caldwell, Bon Secours St. Francis Health System | Brandon Cook, New Horizon Family Health Services Inc. | Dr. Amy Crockett, Prisma Health | Melinda Gillespie, Prisma Health | Amy Linsin, Prisma Health | Susan McLarty, Greenville Homeless Alliance | Dr. Kenneth Rogers, South Carolina Department of Mental Health | Dr. Shelia Roundtree, Greenville VA Clinic | Dr. Kerry Sease, Bradshaw Institute | Sally Wills, LiveWell Greenville*

## INCOME & WEALTH: RECOMMENDATIONS

*Co-chairs: Jessica Donan, EY + Will Whitley, Michelin North America  
Facilitator: Eleanor Dunlap, Independent Consultant*

- 1 Provide a long-term commitment to Black-owned businesses through strengthening the ecosystem, enabling equitable access to social and financial capital, investment in the recruitment of Black-owned businesses to the area, and enhance public and private procurement policies to provide equitable opportunities.
- 2 Increase the percentage of Black individuals earning a livable wage through various campaigns to drive awareness of disparities, establish systems to increase the pipeline into trade careers, incumbent worker training or skill-up programs, as well as development of innovative funding pools or alternative financing options for Black students.
- 3 Decrease the race-based pay gap through an increase in talent recruitment, retention and development, and provide access to asset-building resources for employees within local companies and organizations.
- 4 Ensure collective action towards housing stability and homeownership through decreasing the housing cost burden by supporting and amplifying existing work.
- 5 Reduce the high cost of debt among Black households through community education and statewide advocacy to adopt a 36% cap on payday and title loans, increase the number of alternative lending programs, provide targeted outreach to Black individuals who are unbanked and underbanked, and expand budgeting and financial management education in middle and high school curriculums.

*Income & Wealth Committee: Joe Erwin, Endeavor | Rich Hagins, US&S | Tammie Hoy-Hawkins, CommunityWorks Carolina | Bob Morris, Community Foundation of Greenville | S.T. Peden, Minority Economic Development Institute | Gage Weekes, Hollingsworth Funds | Mayor Knox White, City of Greenville*

# WHAT'S NEXT

From the beginning, sustainability of the REEM Commission has been important, and a commitment was made by leadership to ensure the long-term success of the Commission's efforts. In December 2021, the founding organizations of the REEM Commission crafted a three-year Memorandum of Understanding to ensure the efforts of the Commission do not go unrealized.

The Commission will not become a stand-alone entity; rather, it will be housed at United Way of Greenville County and governed by a leadership council comprised of key community leaders. This decision was made primarily so the new executive director of the REEM Commission may focus on convening around and achieving the goals defined in Phase 1.

The REEM Commission, and the critical work focused on systems-level changes, continues to be an example to other community organizations who are also committed to racial equity and economic mobility. The Greenville community and beyond will be apprised of the REEM Commission's efforts at [reemgvl.org](http://reemgvl.org), which will be regularly updated.

## RACIAL EQUITY AND ECONOMIC MOBILITY COMMISSION LEADERSHIP

Merl Code, Co-Chair  
Ogletree Deakins

David Lominack, Co-Chair  
TD Bank

Meghan Barp  
United Way of  
Greenville County

Pastor Sean Dogan  
Long Branch  
Baptist Church

Carlos Phillips  
Greenville Chamber  
of Commerce

Dr. Gail Wilson Awan  
Urban League  
of the Upstate

## REEM COMMISSIONERS

Peggy Baxter  
Community Advocate

Dr. Karen Baynes-Dunning  
Baynes-Dunning Consulting

Kennedy Brown  
Youth Advocate

Matt Caldwell  
Bon Secours St. Francis

Dr. Shaniece Criss  
Furman University  
& TR City Council

Capt. Cheryl Cromartie  
Greenville County Sheriff's Office

Dr. Elizabeth Davis  
Furman University

Jessica Donan  
EY

Joe Erwin  
Endeavor

Traci Fant  
Freedom Fighters Upstate  
Foundation

Rich Hagins  
US&S

Robert Hughes  
Hughes Development

Butch Kirven  
Greenville County Council

Sheriff Hobart Lewis  
Greenville County Sheriff's Office

Amy Linsin  
Prisma Health

Deb Long  
Bon Secours St Francis

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SC Community Loan Fund

Stacey Mills  
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Community Foundation  
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Minority Economic  
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Greenville County Schools

Liz Seman  
Furman University

Minor Shaw  
Micco LLC

Katy Smith  
Greenville Partnership  
for Philanthropy

Tamela Spann  
Hollingsworth Funds

Chief Howie Thompson  
Greenville Police Department

Gage Weekes  
Hollingsworth Funds

Mayor Knox White  
City of Greenville

Will Whitley  
Michelin North America

Dr. Baxter Wynn  
United Ministries

Sam Zimmerman  
NAACP Greenville

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