

U.S. House Committee on
THE JUDICIARY
CHAIRMAN JERROLD NADLER

(/)

Chairman Nadler Statement for the Subcommittee Hearing on H.R. 40, the Commission to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African-Americans Act

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Washington, D.C. – Today, House Judiciary Committee Chairman Jerrold Nadler (D-NY) released the following statement at a Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Civil Liberties hearing on H.R. 40, the *Commission to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African-Americans Act*:

“Thank you, Chairman Cohen, for calling this important hearing. This year, we marked the 400th anniversary of the first enslaved Africans arriving at the colony of Jamestown, Virginia. Today’s hearing on ‘H.R. 40 and the Path to Restorative Justice’ gives us the opportunity to reflect on the shameful legacy of slavery and Jim Crow in this country, and to examine how we can best move forward as a nation.

“For nearly three decades, the former Chairman of the Judiciary Committee, John Conyers of Michigan, introduced H.R. 40, which would establish a commission to study reparation proposals for African Americans. Our colleague, the Gentlewoman from Texas, Ms. Jackson Lee, has taken up

sponsorship of this legislation, and I am pleased to be a cosponsor.

“H.R. 40 is intended to begin a national conversation about how to confront the brutal mistreatment of African-Americans during chattel slavery, Jim Crow segregation, and the enduring structural racism that remains endemic to our society today.

“Even long after slavery was abolished, segregation and subjugation of African Americans was a defining part of this nation’s policies that shaped its values and its institutions. Today, we still live with racial disparities in access to education, health care, housing, insurance, employment and other social goods that are directly attributable to the damaging legacy of slavery and government-sponsored racial discrimination.

“It is important to recognize that H.R. 40 makes no conclusion about how to properly atone for, and make recompense for, the legacy of slavery and its lingering consequences. Instead, it sets forth a process by which a diverse group of experts and stakeholders can study the complex issues involved and make recommendations.

“Most serious reparations models that have been proposed to date, in fact, have focused on restorative community-based programs of employment, health care, housing, and educational initiatives—righting wrongs that cannot be fixed with checks alone.

“This moment of national reckoning comes at a time when our nation must find constructive ways to confront a rising tide of racial and ethnic division. In April, this Committee held a hearing on hate crimes and the rise of white nationalism to begin framing a federal response. Hate crimes, white supremacy and the legacy of slavery, all hold back our country’s longstanding efforts to carry out what the Preamble to our Constitution says it is designed to do—to form ‘a more perfect union.’

“Reparations in the context of H.R. 40 are ultimately about respect and reconciliation—and the hope that one day, all Americans can walk together toward a more just future. I hope that the commission established by H.R. 40 can help us better comprehend our own history and bring us closer to racial understanding and advancement, and justice.

“Today’s hearing gives the Subcommittee an important opportunity to hear from witnesses directly involved in shaping the discourse on healing our society and creating a path to restorative justice. I am pleased that we have such a distinguished panel of witnesses, whose testimony will assist us

greatly in understanding the scope of our inquiry.

“The discussion of reparations is a journey in which the road traveled may be almost as important as the exact destination. I am pleased that the Subcommittee is beginning this process today and I look forward to hearing from our witnesses.”

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