

**BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION
REQUEST FOR BOARD ACTION**

NO.: BHE 26-66

DATE: May 19, 2026

**APPROVAL OF RENAMING OF BERKSHIRE COMMUNITY COLLEGE'S LIBRARY
IN HONOR OF RUTH EDMONDS HILL**

MOVED: The Board of Higher Education hereby approves the request of Berkshire Community College's Board of Trustees to rescind the name of the Reverend Jonathan Edwards from the College's Library and name the Library in honor of Ruth Edmonds Hill.

VOTED: Motion adopted by the BHE on 5/19/2026.

Authority: Massachusetts General Laws c. 15A, §6 and 9(m); BHE 17-23
Contact: Matthew Cole, Deputy Commissioner Administration, Finance, and Operations

Background

In 2014, the Board of Higher Education (BHE) adopted a policy regarding building naming rights at Massachusetts State Universities and Community Colleges, which was most recently amended on January 24, 2017. The policy is entitled "BHE Policy

Regarding Building Naming Rights at Massachusetts Public Higher Education Institutions (“the Policy”), and accessible here: [FAAP Motion 17-23](#). The Policy sets forth the criteria for the BHE to use in approving the naming of new and existing buildings, as well as the criteria for rescinding naming rights.

Under Section VI of the Policy, the BHE may approve a request to rescind a naming right for several reasons, including under circumstances where “an individual, group, or organization is determined to have acted in a manner that is in violation of Federal and State law, including, but not limited to, the state’s code of ethics, or has acted in a manner that is inconsistent with the institution’s values and mission.” In addition, under Section V, of the Policy the BHE may vote to name a building “in honor of an individual, organization, or group having made a distinguished contribution of service, research, teaching or support to the campus; in honor of an individual, organization, or group having made a distinguished contribution of service or support to the community, the Commonwealth, or the nation.”

The Berkshire Community College’s (BCC) Board of Trustees unanimously voted on March 24, 2026 to rescind the name of the Reverend Jonathan Edwards from the College’s Library, as communicated to the Department of Higher Education in an April 10, 2026 letter from President Ellen Kennedy (Attachment A), based on the determination that, “Edwards acted in a manner inconsistent with the institution’s values and mission ... [and] [t]he determination was grounded in historical documentation confirming that Edwards enslaved people.”

In the same meeting, the BCC Board of Trustees unanimously voted to name the Library in honor of Ruth Edmonds Hill (1925-2023), based on the determination that she made a distinguished contribution of service or support to the Community and the Commonwealth. The Board noted the following in support of this designation:

- Ruth Edmonds Hill dedicated her career to documenting and preserving African American history and underrepresented voices, both locally and nationally.
- She served Berkshire Community College’s Library directly, as well as the Berkshire Athenaeum and other regional institutions.
- She served four decades as Oral History Curator at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard University’s Schlesinger Library, leading landmark documentation projects focused on Black women, women in the federal government, and Asian American and Latina women.
- She was a co-founder of the National Black Storytellers Association and recipient of the Zora Neale Hurston Oral History Award.
- She earned one of her degrees from what is now the University of Massachusetts Amherst.
- She was instrumental in placing the Pittsfield homestead of her great-grandfather, the Reverend Samuel Harrison, on the National Register of Historic Places, further rooting her legacy in Berkshire County’s history.

In addition, and relatedly, the BCC Board and presidential leadership are committed to conducting a library fundraising campaign, which will include efforts to address

refreshing and modernizing the collection. This motion supports the BCC Board of Trustees' unanimous votes to rescind the name of the Reverend Jonathan Edwards from the College's Library and name the Library in honor of Ruth Edmonds Hill.

In support of this request, please see the attached letter from President Ellen Kennedy (Attachment A).

Staff Recommendation

Department staff have determined that the Berkshire Community College Trustees' building naming request complies with BHE's building naming criteria. *FAAP Motion 17-23*. Staff recommendation is for approval of the request.