

April 10, 2026

Commissioner Noe Ortega  
Massachusetts Department of Higher Education

Senior Deputy Commissioner Cha Santos  
Massachusetts Department of Higher Education

General Counsel Anastasia Papanikolaou  
Massachusetts Department of Higher Education

Matthew Cole, Esq.  
Massachusetts Department of Higher Education

Dear Commissioner Ortega, Deputy Commissioner Santos, General Counsel Papanikolaou, and Mr. Cole:

I write to formally notify the Department of Higher Education of the actions taken by the Berkshire Community College Board of Trustees on March 24, 2026, regarding the renaming of the College's Library, and to respectfully request that the Board of Higher Education take up and approve the two related motions at its earliest practicable opportunity—and ideally no later than its June 16, 2026 meeting.

### **Background**

As I shared with Commissioner Ortega in prior correspondence, Berkshire Community College has been engaged in a deliberate and inclusive process to examine the background of the Reverend Jonathan Edwards, for whom our Library has been named since 1972. Through extensive historical research, structured campus and community dialogue, and formal task force work, the College confirmed that Rev. Edwards enslaved individuals. A Library Naming Task Force subsequently recommended that the College rename the Library.

A second task force was then charged with identifying potential honorees, gathering nominations, conducting research, hosting community feedback sessions, and providing the President with three recommendations. That task force identified Ruth Edmonds Hill as its most

strongly supported recommendation. The proposal was reviewed and approved through the College's shared governance process before being advanced to the Board of Trustees.

In response to your earlier inquiry: the Library is a stand-alone building at Berkshire Community College. The name appears on the exterior of the structure. Accordingly, we confirm that the BHE Building Naming Policy (FAAP 15-14) applies in full.

### **Board of Trustees Actions — March 24, 2026**

At its March 24, 2026 meeting, the Berkshire Community College Board of Trustees unanimously approved the following two motions:

#### ***Motion 1 — Rescission of Current Library Name (FAAP 15-14, Section VI(1))***

Pursuant to Section VI(1) of the BHE Building Naming Policy (FAAP 15-14), the Board of Trustees voted unanimously to rescind the name of the Reverend Jonathan Edwards from the College's Library, based on the determination that Edwards acted in a manner inconsistent with the institution's values and mission. This determination was grounded in historical documentation confirming that Edwards enslaved people, and in the findings of a campus and community task force that concluded his legacy presents an irreconcilable conflict with the College's commitments to equity, inclusion, and anti-racism. The Board further affirmed that this action reflects deliberate institutional reflection and accountability, not the erasure of history—and directed that a permanent display be installed in the Library to document the naming and renaming process.

#### ***Motion 2 — Naming of the Library in Honor of Ruth Edmonds Hill (FAAP 15-14, Section V)***

Pursuant to Section V of the BHE Building Naming Policy (FAAP 15-14), the Board of Trustees voted unanimously 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 for 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.

### **Formal Request**

Berkshire Community College respectfully requests that the Board of Higher Education approve the following actions, consistent with BHE Building Naming Policy FAAP 15-14:

1. The rescission of the name of the Reverend Jonathan Edwards from the College's Library, pursuant to Section VI(1) of FAAP 15-14; and
2. The naming of the Library in honor of Ruth Edmonds Hill, pursuant to Section V of FAAP 15-14.

We believe the process we have followed has been thorough, inclusive, and fully aligned with the requirements of FAAP 15-14. Enclosed with this letter for the Department's review is a complete packet of supporting documentation, including the task force reports, a summary of community feedback sessions, the shared governance record of approval, the Board of Trustees meeting minutes and motions of March 24, 2026, and background materials on both Jonathan Edwards and Ruth Edmonds Hill.

We are grateful for the Department's guidance throughout this process and for the opportunity to bring this work to conclusion. I would welcome the chance to answer any questions or provide any additional information that would be helpful to the Department or the Board of Higher Education as it considers these requests. Please do not hesitate to contact me directly.

With appreciation and warm regards,



Ellen Kennedy