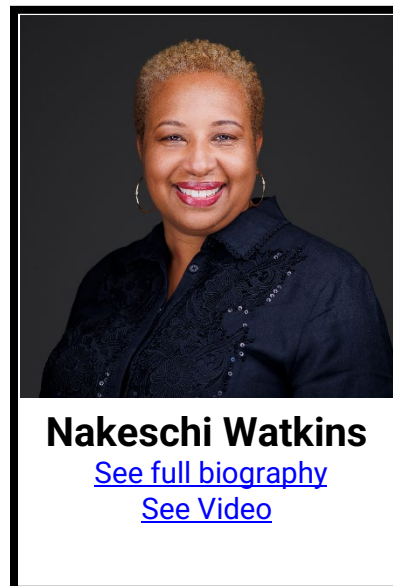


URMIA Election Candidate 2026

| Individual Profile | | | |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------|
| Name: | Nakeschi Watkins | Position: | President-Elect |
| Title | Director, Risk Management and Insurance | Institution | Cornell University |
| Designations | B.S. | Years in Higher Ed RM | 2007 |
| Gender | Woman | Race | African American |
| Institution Profile | | | |
| Membership category | Institutional Tier 6 | Student FTE of institution | 25,582 |
| Type of institution | Private | Two-year institution | No |



What leadership skills and talents make you a good candidate?

I am a strong candidate for URMIA President-Elect because I bring a unique combination of hands-on higher education risk management experience, proven leadership within our profession, and a deep commitment to serving URMIA members. My 12 years of service in the United States Army further shaped my leadership approach, instilling the values of integrity, accountability, adaptability, and service. Combined with my professional experience and association involvement, these qualities have prepared me to lead with purpose, foster meaningful engagement among members, and help advance URMIA's mission. As President-Elect, I would bring a collaborative, strategic, and member-focused perspective dedicated to supporting the evolving needs of higher education risk management professionals.

As a university risk manager, and Director of Risk Management and Insurance of multiple institutions, URMIA Board member, and RIMS chapter leader, I more than understand the challenges our members face, I have lived and continue to live them. I understand the realities of balancing institutional priorities, navigating emerging risks, managing limited resources, responding to crises, and demonstrating the strategic value of risk management in a constantly evolving higher education environment. My leadership is grounded in practical experience, which allows me to effectively advocate for and support our members.

At the center of my leadership philosophy is a commitment to putting members first. Every decision, initiative, and strategic priority should begin with one fundamental question: How does this serve our members? URMIA's greatest strength is its membership, and I am committed to ensuring that our organization continues to deliver meaningful value through education, networking, professional development, mentorship, and thought leadership. I believe our members deserve leaders who listen, engage, and act in their best interests.

I am also deeply passionate about developing future leaders and strengthening the pipeline of risk management professionals. As someone who has benefited from mentorship and professional guidance throughout my career, I understand the importance of creating opportunities for emerging professionals. Under my leadership, I would continue to champion pathways for engagement, leadership development, mentoring, and professional growth, ensuring that the next generation of risk managers not only have a seat at the table but also a clear pathway to success.

One of my greatest strengths is understanding that insurance alone cannot protect our institutions. Policies have limits, but the true value of risk management extends far beyond transactional insurance coverage. Effective risk management protects reputation, culture, relationships, institutional resilience, and trust. A core principle that guides my leadership is the belief that risk management protects trust. In higher education, trust is one of an institution's most valuable assets. Students, faculty, staff, alumni, donors, patients, regulators, and the public expect universities to operate responsibly, protect resources, maintain safe environments, and fulfill their mission. Effective risk management helps organizations anticipate, understand, and address risks before they negatively affect the people and communities they serve. By promoting transparency, accountability, preparedness, and informed decision-making, risk management enables institutions to achieve their goals while maintaining the confidence of their stakeholders.

The most significant risks facing higher education today include reputational harm, cultural challenges, leadership transitions, and emerging risks that insurance products have yet to fully address, requiring proactive leadership and strategic thinking. I champion a process-first mindset that identifies exposures before they become crises, aligns leadership around shared priorities, builds a culture of preparedness, and positions risk professionals as strategic partners rather than simply managers of claims and insurance programs.

I am also a strong believer that relationships produce results. Throughout my career, I have built collaborative partnerships across higher education institutions, professional associations, insurers, brokers, and peer networks. These relationships create opportunities for innovation, knowledge sharing, problem-solving, and collective success. I believe one of URMIA's most valuable assets is its community, and I am committed to strengthening those connections and fostering an environment where members learn from one another and grow together.

In addition, I bring a forward-looking perspective to leadership. Higher education continues to face rapidly changing risks from high insurance premiums, risk financing strategies, global travel, and student safety concerns to cybersecurity threats, workforce challenges, regulatory changes, and evolving insurance markets. I embrace innovation and strategic thinking, and I believe URMIA must continue to anticipate future challenges. My goal is to continue to equip both URMIA and its members for positions where they can lead confidently and effectively in an increasingly complex and dynamic risk environment.

Most importantly, I am fully committed to URMIA and the risk management profession we serve. This is not a steppingstone for me. URMIA is my professional community, higher education is my passion, and service is a responsibility I take seriously. I believe deeply in URMIA's mission, the value it provides to its members, and the important role it plays in advancing higher education risk management. If elected President-Elect, I will bring energy, dedication, strategic vision, and a member-focused approach to every aspect of the role.

I am all in for URMIA, for our members, and for the future of higher education risk.

What would you bring to the board (e.g., thought leadership, talent, skillset, ability, etc.)?

I would bring a combination of strategic thought leadership, practical higher education risk management expertise, collaborative leadership, and an unwavering commitment to member engagement and professional development.

As a Director of Risk Management and Insurance, URMIA Board member, and RIMS chapter leader, I have developed a broad perspective on the evolving challenges facing higher education institutions. My experience spans enterprise risk management, insurance strategy, student and international travel risk, crisis management, contractual risk transfer, and organizational resilience. I understand both the operational realities facing risk professionals as well as strategic conversations taking place at the senior

leadership level and boardrooms, which enables me to bridge those perspectives effectively. I would also bring a strong member-first mindset. I believe the Board's responsibility is to ensure that every decision, initiative, and investment creates meaningful value for URMIA members. Whether through education, networking opportunities, professional development programs, mentoring initiatives, or resources that help members address emerging challenges, I am committed to ensuring member needs remain at the center of our strategic direction.

One of my greatest strengths is my ability to see beyond insurance and focus on the broader risk management process. While insurance remains an important risk financing tool, many of the most significant risks facing higher education today cannot be solved through coverage alone. Reputational damage, cultural challenges, leadership transitions, emerging risks, and organizational resilience require proactive risk management, strong governance, and strategic planning. I would bring a process-focused perspective that helps position risk professionals as trusted strategic advisors and institutional partners. I would contribute strong relationship-building and collaboration skills. Throughout my career, I have built productive partnerships across campuses, professional associations, insurers, brokers, consultants, and peer networks. I believe that relationships produce results, and I recognize that URMIA's success is strengthened not only by its members but also by the many affiliates and business partners who support and advance our profession. I am committed to fostering meaningful engagement between members and our affiliates and other educational organization, creating opportunities for knowledge sharing, innovation, and collaboration that benefit the entire higher education risk management community. In addition, I am passionate about developing the next generation of risk management leaders. The future of our profession depends on attracting, mentoring, and retaining talented professionals. I would continue to advocate for programs that support emerging leaders, create pathways for engagement, and strengthen the talent pipeline for both URMIA and the broader higher education risk management community.

I also bring a forward-thinking innovative perspective. Higher education continues to face rapidly changing risks, from cybersecurity and artificial intelligence to student safety, global programs, workforce challenges, and evolving insurance markets. I believe URMIA must continue to anticipate future challenges, embrace innovation, and leverage the expertise of its members, affiliates, and strategic partners to help institutions navigate an increasingly complex environment.

Above all, I bring energy, dedication, integrity, and a genuine passion for service. I am committed to helping URMIA remain the premier resource for higher education risk management professionals while strengthening relationships across our membership, affiliate community, and strategic partnerships. Together, we can continue building a vibrant, inclusive, and forward-looking organization that supports the success of the entire higher education risk management profession.

Learn more about me <http://bit.ly/4oSotau>