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Subject: FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Representative Benjamin Reacts to DOE Rejection of AP African American History Course
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CONTACT

William Green
Office of Representative Benjamin
William.Green@myfloridahouse.gov
305-632-8601

Representative Benjamin Reacts to DOE Rejection of AP African American History Course

MIAMI GARDENS, Fla. – Representative Christopher Benjamin (D- Miami Gardens) issued the following in reaction to the recent news that the Florida Department of Education had rejected an AP class on African American history with no explanation or path for remedy:

Florida Statute 1003.42 states (in pertinent parts): ... (2) Members of the instructional staff of the public schools, subject to the rules of the State Board of Education and the district school board, ***shall teach*** efficiently and faithfully, using the books and materials required that meet the highest standards for professionalism and historical accuracy, following the prescribed courses of study, and employing approved methods of instruction, the following: ... (h) ***The History of African Americans***, including the history of African peoples before the political conflicts that led to the development of slavery, the passage of America, the enslavement experience, abolition and the contributions of African Americans to society - this is what was required prior to the amendments that I (and Minority Leader Fentrice Driskell) authored to HB 7.

After our amendments, the ***required studies*** on the history of African Americans were expanded. Leader Driskell's amendment lead to the following modification: ... contributions of ***Americans of the African diaspora*** to society ... My amendments lead to the following expansion: ... *Students shall develop an understanding of the ramifications of prejudice, racism, and stereotyping on individual freedoms, ... Instruction shall include the roles and contributions of individuals from all walks of life ... Instructional material shall include the vital contributions of African Americans to build and strengthen American society and celebrate the inspirational stories of African Americans who prospered even in the most difficult of circumstances. Instructional personnel may facilitate discussions and use curricula to address ... how the individual freedoms of persons have been infringed by slavery, racial oppression, racial segregation, and racial discrimination, as well as topics relating to the enactment and enforcement of laws resulting in racial oppression, racial segregation, and racial discrimination ... The department shall prepare and offer standards and curriculum for the instruction required by this paragraph ...*

I've highlighted the word *shall* in the amended portions of the statute to show and emphasize that the instruction described is mandatory and that it is the Department's responsibility to ensure that there are standards and curriculum for the mandatory instruction of African American history in Florida. It is my understanding that the AP

African American studies offered by the Board of Colleges would meet the mandatory instruction requirements of the amended statute. As reported by the Orlando Sentinel, the course is currently run as a pilot in 60 high schools nationwide. The course draws from a variety of fields such as literature, arts, humanities, political science, geography and science in order to explore the *vital* contributions and experiences of African Americans. It is reported that the College Board has said: "As with all AP courses in the humanities, it is not a theory course; students instead immerse themselves in primary sources." As with all AP courses, "students will encounter evidence, weigh competing viewpoints and come to their own conclusions" about topics introduced. The Board has said "AP students are never required to agree with a particular opinion or adopt a particular ideology, but are expected to analyze different perspectives". The course submitted has been in development for over a decade by scholars from Notre Dame and Tuskegee and offered initially at Howard University.

I'm concerned that the Office of Articulation would deem such a curriculum contrary to Florida law and significantly lacking in educational value. I have made great effort in making sure that last year's Individual Freedom Act did not disrupt required African American studies and rather expanded what was a lacking standard for African American studies that stood untouched for over 20 years. I cannot see how a curriculum such as the one reported here can be said to run afoul of the law, when it would surely assist the Department in adhering to its statutory duties as outlined in the new law. I'm also concerned that the approved standards and curricula currently in place are rarely offered. In light of these discoveries, I'm calling on the Department of Education and the Office of Articulation to meet with me on this issue. What is most important here is that Florida's students are taught the rich, diverse and vital history of African Americans in this country. It is my intent to hold the agencies to the mandates of the statute and ensure that African American studies remain as important an educational imperative as any other required cultural instruction offered by Florida's Department of Education (*as is required by law*).

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