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Representative Fentrice Driskell Champions Education-Forward Policy Agenda for 2022 Legislative Session

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. – As an advocate for stronger public education to ensure a brighter future for our children, **Representative Fentrice Driskell (D-Tampa)** is carrying a portfolio of five bills this legislative session that focus on improvements to Florida’s education system. **Representative Driskell** is championing an education-forward legislative agenda that addresses accountability, stability in the profession and continuity for students, mental health, and equality in our school system.



“As the daughter of a public school teacher and a product of Florida’s public schools, I know firsthand that a high-quality public education opens doors. All of Florida’s children deserve the freedom to be healthy, prosperous, and safe. My priority as State Representative is keeping our kids safe and fully funding our schools. This legislative session, I am proud to carry five bills with education champions like Senator Janet Cruz, Senator Bobby Powell, and Senator Annette Taddeo that will improve our education system and ensure a brighter future for our students,” said **Representative Fentrice Driskell.**

Representative Driskell’s proposed policy package is garnering the support of education and community advocates statewide. The education-focused policy portfolio includes the following pieces of legislation: [HJR 77](#), Election of Education Commissioner, will allow the people of Florida to elect the head of our state’s education system. The bill would allow voters to select the Education Commissioner of their choice, allowing for greater transparency and accountability in this important role that shapes the state’s education policy for

millions of students and their families.

“As the first woman elected to be Florida’s Education Commissioner, I was the voice for our parents and students pushing for education policies that would improve our education. I thank Rep. Driskell for uplifting the voices of our students and teachers by prioritizing education policies this legislative session,” said **The Honorable Betty Castor, former Florida Education Commissioner.**

HB 1215, Abandoned and Historic Cemeteries, creates a dedicated Office of Historic Cemeteries to identify and promote the preservation of abandoned African-American cemeteries and directs the Department of Education to develop meaningful curriculum relating to instructional education about abandoned and historic cemeteries in Florida.

“The Task Force for Abandon African American cemeteries was able to identify that every cemetery was not abandoned. We recognize some African American cemeteries were stolen or taken by city or county. We were able to explore many ideas to strengthen the needs of African American cemeteries. It is my hope that these recommendations be considered to allow African American cemeteries to be treated with RESPECT,” said **Yvette Lewis, President of the Hillsborough NAACP and member of the Statewide Abandoned African-American Cemeteries Task Force.**

HB 1457, Contracts for Instructional Personnel, provides our hardworking teachers greater job security by allowing for automatic contract renewals for those with “effective” or “highly effective” evaluations.

“We must take steps that address the massive and critical teacher shortage. HB 1457 will bring long-overdue stability to the teaching profession in Florida, something that will go a long way in helping districts keep teachers working in our public schools, rather than seeking employment elsewhere,” said **Andrew Spar, President of the Florida Education Association.**

HB 1459, Mental Health of Minors, protects our youth facing mental health crises by requiring parental notification prior to and creates an Office of Safe Schools in the Department of Education to serve as a central repository for best practices and training standards.

“Thank you Representative Driskell for your focus on protecting youth in Florida. The trauma of involuntary commitment, where children are kept in facilities for up to 72 hours away from their families and support systems, cannot be undone. HB 1459 will create rules specific to the involuntary examination of children that recognize their unique needs, ensure parental rights are respected, reduce unnecessary involuntary commitments, and minimize unnecessary trauma to Florida’s children,” said **Disability Rights Florida.**

HB 1463, Student Financial Aid, will allow students seeking post-secondary education to receive financial aid awards regardless of their immigration status. This will allow for equal access to education to level the playing field for young people who find themselves in America through no fault of their own, better preparing them to compete in and contribute to the 21st century economy.

“Immigration status should never be a barrier to receiving a quality education in the State of Florida. Florida College Democrats applaud the efforts of Representative Driskell and Senator Taddeo in putting HB 1463 forward and standing with students

across the state who are in need of support,” said **Dylan Hall, President of Florida College Democrats.**

Alexis Roberson, the Tampa Governor for the University of South Florida’s consolidated Student Government, similarly praised Rep. Driskell’s efforts to make higher education more affordable for all students regardless of the circumstances that brought them to this country. Eligibility and provision of financial aid has the impact to gravely change the experience of students experiencing financial hardship. Many of the undocumented students currently attending the University of South Florida have grown up and attended school in not only the United States but specifically the state of Florida. They deserve the opportunity to further their education without financial debt or stress. I am confident that this will equip them with the necessary prowess to truly succeed during their collegiate career”

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State Representative Fentrice Driskell represents Florida House District 63, which is located in Hillsborough County and includes the Tampa-area communities of Carrollwood, Lake Magdalene, Lutz, University, New Tampa, and Pebble Creek.