



## COMMISSIONER'S TASK FORCE ON AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY

### **Task Force Members**

Dr. Samuel L. Wright Sr., Vice Chair  
Mrs. Tracy Oliver  
Dr. Brenda L. Walker, Esq  
Dr. Donna R. Austin

Emerita.  
Frederica S. Wilson  
U.S. Rep. Florida,  
24<sup>th</sup> District

Emerita.  
Geraldine Thompson  
The Florida Senate  
15<sup>th</sup> District

Principal Investigator  
Dr. Bernadette Kelley-Brown

April 21, 2023

Dr. Paul O. Burns  
Chancellor, Division of K-12 Public Schools  
Florida Department of Education  
325 W Gaines Street  
Tallahassee, Florida 32399

Re: Commissioner's Task Force on African American History Annual Meeting

Dear Chancellor Burns,

We hope this message finds you well. Thank you for attending the Annual Meeting of the African American History Task Force. We wholeheartedly appreciate your support and the willingness of you and your staff to collaborate to make a difference for children in our schools throughout the state of Florida.

Please accept this letter in follow-up to our meeting held in Tallahassee on Friday, March 31, 2023. The concerns that we expressed in that meeting are as follows: we decided we would write to you to discuss several of our concerns.

They are as follows:

- Mixed and conflicting messages are being communicated relative to the teaching of African and African American history. We were most encouraged and pleased to hear you advise us to accelerate our work around that mission. However, we are mindful of the chilling messages sent forth from the Governor's Office regarding possible disincentives and even sanctions for K-12 and University faculty who teach or even attempt to have authentic conversations about our history, especially when it cannot and should not be romanticized or glorified. While your message is encouraging and promotes the teaching of African and African American history, the resounding and louder message from the Governor runs contrary to your own. The reality is that both K-12 and University faculty and administrators have become so threatened by the explicit and implied consequences, that even if they wanted to embrace the teaching of African and African American history, they dare not. Therefore, our overarching concern lies with the mixed and conflicting messages between the Florida Department of Education and the Governor. Our concern begs the question—To what extent is the Florida Department of Education having conversations with the Governor and his staff about the importance of explicit and intentional teaching African and African American teaching?

- The composition of our Task Force has dwindled considerably. Despite the By-laws stating that we are to have 11 members, we are currently down to four (4) voting members. It is imperative that we return to a fully complemented Task Force expeditiously. Your staff mentioned that you have names of educators who could potentially serve as Task Force members. Would you please share those names immediately? In addition, we would like you to appoint new members before July 1, 2023, the end of the fiscal year.

- Your staff also noted that additional funds were available for the work of the Task Force. Please let us know the amount and how we may access those funds.

As you can see, these concerns stand to seriously impede our work. Your immediate response would be both appreciated and will greatly advance the work that we have been charged to do.

Most sincerely,

*Dr. Samuel L. Wright, SR*

Dr. Samuel L. Wright, SR  
AAHTF, Vice Chair

cc: AAHTF Members  
Dr. Bernadette Kelley Brown, Principal Investigator