

NAACP Urges Caution: Travel Advisory Issued for Florida Due to Restrictions on Black History Education and Diversity Programs in Schools



The NAACP Board of Directors has recently issued a formal travel advisory for the state of Florida, raising concerns over a series of laws signed by Governor Ron DeSantis. According to the organization, these laws are seen as attempts to erase Black history and restrict diversity, equity, and inclusion programs in Florida schools. The advisory serves as a cautionary message to individuals, highlighting the state's perceived hostility towards African Americans, people of color, and LGBTQ+ individuals.

Among the specific policies cited in the advisory are SB 266 and HB 7. SB 266, which was signed into law just last week, prohibits higher education institutions in Florida from utilizing state funds for diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives. Governor DeSantis argues that this law promotes individual treatment by banning programs that he believes encourage discrimination, exclusion, and indoctrination. This legislation builds upon the previously passed SB 7044, which mandates regular evaluations of tenured faculty members and requires professors to disclose their textbook lists online 45 days prior to the start of their classes.

In March, college students in Florida organized walkouts in protest of HB 999, a similar proposal being considered in the state's House of Representatives. The NAACP advisory also highlights HB 7, also known as the Stop Wrongs Against Our Kids and Employees Act, enacted in 2022. This law aimed to restrict the teaching of Critical Race Theory at public universities and limit diversity training within employers. However, a federal court blocked certain provisions of HB 7, deeming them unconstitutional.

The travel advisory additionally references several other pieces of legislation, including HB 1, SB 7066, and HB 543, which the NAACP believes pose threats to civil rights in Florida. HB 1, enacted in 2021, imposed new criminal penalties on protestors, denied state grants to any government entity that attempted to defund the police, and denied bond to individuals participating in disorderly assemblies until their first court appearance. However, a federal court ruled this law unconstitutional in March.

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SB 7066, passed in 2019, required felons to pay outstanding fines resulting from their convictions before being granted the right to vote. While a federal district judge initially blocked this law, the US Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit later overturned the decision. In April 2023, HB 543 was passed, eliminating licensing requirements for concealed carry of firearms and permitting concealed carry in most public places. This statute is set to take effect on July 1.

The travel advisory concludes with a call to action for Florida residents, urging them to join the NAACP's advocacy efforts to oppose what they view as regressive policies enacted by Governor DeSantis and the state legislature. The organization highlights the power of collective voices in protecting democracy and civil rights.

Governor DeSantis defends his education reform as a means to bring greater accountability to Florida's higher education system. In a news release from January 2023, he emphasized the alignment of core curriculum with the values of liberty and the Western tradition, elimination of politicized bureaucracies such as DEI, increased research funding for programs benefitting Florida's key industries, and empowering university presidents and boards of trustees in faculty recruitment. The governor has expressed the intention to allocate significant resources for faculty salaries.

As the NAACP travel advisory raises concerns over Florida's recent laws and their potential impact on education and diversity, individuals are urged to stay informed and consider these developments when making decisions about travel and engagement in the state.