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January 15, 2021

Tony Thurmond

State Superintendent, CA Department of Education

1430 N Street

Sacramento, California 95814

Re: [W. Haywood Burns Institute] OPPOSITION to Current Revisions of CA ESMC

Dear Superintendent Thurmond,

On behalf of W. Haywood Burns Institute (BI), I am writing in **opposition** to the **current version of the CA Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC)**, which does not live up to the values, principles, and pedagogy of Ethnic Studies. Essential Ethnic Studies terminology, including the definition of race, has been eliminated, incorrectly defined, or moved to the footnotes. The decolonial, anti-racist, and liberatory focus of Ethnic Studies has been buried in an avalanche of vague and contradictory language. And Arab American Studies has been moved from its rightful place in Asian American/Pacific Islander Studies to an “interethnic bridge-building appendix.” We share the anger of our Arab siblings that their history and community has been relegated to an appendix.

BI is a black-led national, non-profit based in Oakland, CA. We are a diverse team of bold visionaries, working to transform the administration of justice. Always challenging racial hierarchy and the social control of communities of color by the justice sector and other public systems, BI employs strategies and tactics to establish a community centered approach of justice administration that is anchored in structural well-being.

As an organization that prioritizes the needs of our community, Ethnic Studies is foundational to the education of our youth and future leaders. We are also concerned that the Ethnic Studies educators who wrote the original ESMC have been sidelined, while politicians and lobbyists have wielded the most influence in what revisions get made. The sidelining of the original committee echoes an all-too-familiar experience amongst people of color of having our expertise denied.

We are echoing and uplifting the demands of the Save Arab American Studies Coalition, and taking the lead from Ethnic Studies educators:

- Re-empower experts in the field of Ethnic Studies to decide on revisions to the ESMC that align with the principles, values, and pedagogy of Ethnic Studies.
- Put Arab American Studies—including Palestine—back where it belongs, within the Asian American Studies section of the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum.
- Approve an ESMC that is anti-racist, decolonial and liberatory—that centers the voices and experiences of communities of color and their struggles for liberation.

We call on the CA Department of Education to take immediate action to protect the integrity of Ethnic Studies. We want a curriculum that meets the needs of our youth and carries on the spirit of the original 1968 Third World Liberation Front and Black Student Union strikes that led to Ethnic Studies as a discipline. It is not too late to stand with us on the right side of history and support an ESMC that will educate, protect, and inspire all our children.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

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Member of the Social Justice and Well-being team

W. Haywood Burns Institute

[contact information redacted]

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