



IFBMW's Statement on Florida's Legislation and NAACP's Travel Ban Advisory

Last week the NAACP Board of Directors issued a formal travel advisory for the state of Florida. The travel advisory is in response to Governor Ron DeSantis' 'Anti Woke' legislation, a passing of various laws that thwart efforts to promote diversity, equity and inclusion and perpetuate harm against marginalized people. The NAACP warns, "Before traveling to Florida, please understand that the state of Florida devalues and marginalizes the contributions of, and the challenges faced by African Americans and other communities of color."

Although the Institute for Black Mental Wellness (IFBMW) supports the NAACP's stance against oppressive lawmaking, we choose to stand in solidarity with the Black individuals, families, entrepreneurs, and students who hold residence in Florida. Therefore, we show our support for them by choosing to hold our annual Black Mental Health Symposium (BMHS) in Jacksonville, FL on September 28-29. We believe that honoring the travel ban will hurt Florida's Black communities and their schools, businesses, and places of employment more than the dent, if any it may make on the state's revenue.

We considered moving the Black Mental Health Symposium but could not find a location in the United States free of discrimination, whether overtly passed in legislation or concealed in the fabric of our country. We believe that staying put is a stronger demonstration of courage, unity, and social justice in a state where mental health advocacy for Black Americans is needed, considering the impact of current legislation upon their wellbeing.

The IFBMW is proud to support Florida's Black communities and businesses with its 8th BMHS by patronizing local Black-owned eateries, event managers and security, and commissioning artists of color for various performances including the HBCU Edward Waters University for our For the Culture opening act. We look forward to collaborating with Counselors for Social Justice to strategically align ourselves with local advocacy agencies, and using the Black Mental Health Symposium as a platform to issue a call-to-action with a press conference where we will release the results of the State of Black Mental Health survey. Attendees will be able to participate in-person or online and earn up to 12 CE credits from counselor and social work boards as they learn culturally responsive interventions to improve the mental wellness of Black Americans.

We envision a world where Black and other marginalized people belong everywhere and that the essence of who they are, and the history of their being be not weaponized nor legislated. We encourage Americans to vote for candidates who hold the same or similar values. We also strive to develop mental health professionals for multicultural and social justice practice and look forward to realizing the theme of this year's Symposium: Learn. Lead. Liberate. Thus, we see Florida's challenges as an opportunity to illuminate the value and gift of Black life.

Join the IFBMW in our efforts to uphold a three-pronged purpose: destigmatize mental illness, increase access to culturally responsive mental healthcare, and improve mental wellness among Black communities. You may donate and register for the Black Mental Health Symposium at blackmhsymposium.com.

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