

ASSEMBLY EDUCATION COMMITTEE

STATEMENT TO

SENATE, No. 3817

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: DECEMBER 9, 2019

The Assembly Education Committee reports favorably Senate Bill No. 3817.

The Amistad Commission was created by P.L.2002, c.75 (C.52:16A-86 et seq.) in order to coordinate educational and other programs on slavery in America and African-American history. Under the original statute, the Amistad Commission was established in the Executive Branch and allocated within the Department of State. The Amistad law, among other things, directs the Department of Education to assist the commission in developing curriculum guidelines regarding slavery and African-American history, distributing educational information and materials to school districts, and monitoring the inclusion of the materials and curricula in the State's educational system. In June 2011, Governor Chris Christie issued Reorganization Plan No. 004-2011 to transfer the Amistad Commission from the Department of State to the Department of Education in order to improve efficiency and quality in the performance of the commission's responsibilities.

This bill amends the statute that created the Amistad Commission to provide that the commission is allocated in but not of the Department of Education, rather than within the Department of State. Notwithstanding this allocation, the commission will be independent of any supervision or control by the department. The bill also provides that State support for the operations of the Amistad Commission will be appropriated by the Legislature to the commission through a separate line item in the annual appropriations act.

Under the bill, the Commissioner of Education will serve as a voting member of the commission, and the Secretary of State will no longer be a member of the commission. The bill directs the commission to annually elect a chairperson and a vice-chairperson from among its members, and provides that the commission will meet upon the call of the chairperson or a majority of its members. The bill requires the commission to appoint an executive director who is qualified by training and experience to perform the duties of the office. The bill requires the commission to approve all Amistad personnel job descriptions and all individuals recommended for employment by the commission's executive director. The bill

directs the Department of Education to provide any additional staff deemed necessary by the commission.

It is the legislation's intent that these changes to the Amistad law will permit the Amistad Commission to maintain its independence and ensure that the resources of the Department of Education are made available for the implementation of the law and the Amistad Commission's mission.

In addition, the bill would supplement existing law to require all boards of education to include instruction that infuses into all courses on the United States, the centuries of accomplishments by African Americans in the building and development of America including, but not limited to, the areas of industry, the professions, local communities, culture, arts, and the sciences. The instruction must enable students to know and understand the nation's heritage of slavery and freedom and the contributions of African Americans to all areas of American society throughout history. The instruction must also emphasize the personal responsibility of each citizen to fight racism and hatred and to uphold the national ideals of freedom and justice. The bill directs the Department of Education to work with the Amistad Commission to ensure that the assessment tools for New Jersey schools are inclusive of the curricular requirements established under the bill.

As reported by the committee, this bill is identical to Assembly Bill No. 5571, which also was reported by the committee on this same date.