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TOWARD A FAIR MICHIGAN LAUNCHES NEW INITIATIVES
"Engaging in a New Conversation on Race and Ethnicity"

East Lansing – On December 8, 2006, Toward A Fair Michigan (TAFM) launched "A New Conversation on Race and Ethnicity" (ANCORE). At the day long Leadership Assembly, a diverse gathering of Michigan citizens explored what is needed in order for Michigan, as a state, to implement the changes in policy and practice required to implement Proposal 2 – the amendment to the state constitution banning affirmative action programs that give preferences on the basis of race, gender, color, ethnicity or national origin in government education, employment and contracting. These concerned citizens also deliberated about practical steps that might be undertaken to foster a healthier and more equitable environment within our state as concerns persons of all races and ethnic backgrounds.

Setting the tone for the day's deliberations, TAFM Board Chairman William B. Allen opened the meeting with these words: "We gather today to organize a defense of the equal opportunity regime. We do so, however, with a deep sense of the immensity of the challenge we face. For at no time since the founding of the United States has the foundational moral equality which is its inner spring ever prevailed without confronting major challenges. And today the challenge comes in the form of a denial that equality is sufficient for constructing a society in which men and women can freely develop and move toward that human flourishing which is the true goal of our political association."

With the goal of human flourishing front and center before them, participants engaged in energetic dialog about effective strategies to advance Michigan toward it. Carol Allen, TAFM Program Director, presented an overview of policies and practices deployed within California, Florida and Michigan in the areas of public education, employment and contracting after those states banned racial and gender preferences in the late 1990s. The review highlighted the types of affirmative action – such as outreach, analysis of workforce and student bodies based on demographic characteristics, assessment and planned improvement of institutional climate – which are not only legal but also vigorously deployed in the "post-preferences" environments of these states.

TAFM President Barbara J. Grutter invited participants to explore ways to leverage the organizational capabilities of Toward A Fair Michigan to promote a new paradigm within

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Michigan – one in which state and local governmental bodies adopt new practices that will conform not only to the letter of the law but also to the spirit of the public decision made in November.

After brainstorming an extensive list of ideas, ranging from a broad desire to heal the wounds from recent and long past racial and ethnic tensions within our society to very specific recommendations for removing barriers in education, contracting, and employment practices within Michigan, participants identified several initiatives that TAFM could sponsor or foster, all the time pressing the urgent need for education reform – and for meaningful school choice for those living in urban and other school districts with seriously underperforming public schools.

Based on the day's discussion and a realistic appraisal of its organizational capabilities, Toward A Fair Michigan commits to deploy its resources in support of three major new undertakings. During the next 12 months, TAFM will:

- **Conduct a Comprehensive Study of Post-Preference Policies and Practices**[1]
    - Prepare Contemporaneous History of Implementation Activities
        - Collect state-wide record of agency/institution responses
        - Monitor developing legal issues/Serve as private attorney general if needed
        - Highlight best practices
        - Identify worst practices
        - Support and encourage transparency by publishing policies, practices, and results

- **Publicize and Promote Positive Steps Taken to Implement Proposal 2**[2]
    - Foster Enhanced Outreach Activities on the part of Agencies and Institutions
        - Provide model practices, for adoption/presentation
        - Identify community-based targets of opportunity for meaningful institutional (especially university) initiatives (i.e., "teach for Michigan," "Educational Enterprise Zones," charter schools, k-12 reform, etc.)

– More –

[1] Despite the fact that state and local government bodies within California, Florida and Washington have many years of experience of operating in a "post-preference environment," there is relatively little in the way of comprehensive study and analysis of what has happened in those states. Yet, such information would be extremely useful as other states contemplate the possibility of reforming affirmative action programs locally. TAFM will commission a twelve-month study of emerging policy and practice – and measured outcomes – within Michigan, which will seek to capture this historical record while it is fresh.

[2] Although there is little in the way of comprehensive analysis of the experiences of California, Florida, and Washington, there is a wealth of information available about individual practices. TAFM will post information on its website about the experience of other states, which may be useful to Michigan public institutions as they adapt local policies to conform to the letter and spirit of Proposal 2. In addition, TAFM will highlight those Michigan institutions whose early steps toward implementation are most praiseworthy.

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- Foster general commentary and letters to editors regarding agency activities
- Urge legislative responses to address underlying circumstances used previously to justify preferences (i.e., educational enterprise zones that will embrace the practices and technologies of "highly effective schools, to close the achievement gap in five years"[3])
- Issue call for legislative agenda to enable alternate/innovative approaches OR to remove barriers to greater social mobility in education, contracting, and employment
- Invite issue reporting through web-site

- **Partner with State and Local Government Bodies and education institutions**[4]
  - Explore Partnership/Training Opportunities to Foster Compliance
    - Develop church/synagogue/temple based forum strategy
    - Recruit agency and corporate partners to participate in training approach that emphasizes obligations not just to the particular organization but to the people of Michigan
    - Develop and appraise higher education admission models
    - Communicate public expectations to affected constituencies
    - Communicate reasonable expectations to public in general
    - Serve as resource center through web-site
    - Provide evaluation/strategic assessment consultancy

In addition, TAFM will work with individuals and organizations to foster an ongoing conversation, throughout the state, about race and ethnicity – a conversation that aims above all to realize a vision of fairness and moral equality for all. Two churches (Union Missionary Baptist Church in Lansing and The Bible Church in Ypsilanti) have already committed to sponsoring opportunities for such dialog within their communities. TAFM will reach out to churches, synagogues and other faith-based organizations as prime partners in this effort to foster dialog.

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[3] Standards of "Higher Performing Schools":

#1. Higher performing schools have high and clear goals

#2. Higher performing secondary schools put all kids—not just some—in a demanding high school core curriculum.

#3. Higher performing schools leave very little about teaching and learning to chance.

#4. Higher performing schools think very hard about how to deploy their resources…both people and time.

#5. In higher performing schools and districts, leaders know that teachers matter a lot. They work hard to attract and hold good teachers. And they work hard to get strong teachers to the students who need them most.

[4] TAFM will provide consulting services to state and local public institutions about policies that are most likely to comply with the new law and about ways to use race-neutral means to achieve inclusive, fair, and transparent processes.

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