



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **Open Letter to Arkansas Martin Luther King, Jr. Commission from the Arkansas Democratic Black Caucus**

***“A man dies when he refuses to stand up for that which is right. A man dies when he refuses to stand up for justice. A man dies when he refuses to take a stand for that which is true.” Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.***

LITTLE ROCK - Arkansas is very fortunate to have a Martin Luther King, Jr. Commission. At its best, this taxpayer-supported state agency is empowered to educate all Arkansans by amplifying the life and legacy of a great American minister and activist who helped advance the progress of racial equity in our country.

In this spirit, we write to express our deep disappointment and true outrage with the MLK Commission’s decision to select former Governor Mike Huckabee as guest speaker for the annual MLK Interfaith Prayer Breakfast on the King holiday, January 17, 2022 at the Governor’s Mansion.

Mr. Huckabee has demonstrated, on numerous occasions, that he is not the appropriate speaker to advocate for unity.

- During Pope Francis’ 2015 U.S. visit, Mr. Huckabee attacked former President Barack Obama’s faith in a television interview, suggesting that the first African-American president “pretends to be” a Christian.
- During his 2016 presidential campaign, Mr. Huckabee attacked Black Lives Matter, erroneously stating that the movement “elevates some lives over others” and claiming that Dr. King would be “appalled by the movement.” His out-of-touch comment was quickly denounced by Martin Luther King III who insisted that his father would embrace the movement and would “be very proud of young people standing up to promote truth, justice and equality.”
- Even more alarming is Huckabee’s claim that the January 6 insurrection at our nation’s Capitol was more of “a rally that turned into a riot because of a few bad actors,” minimizing the mob violence that threatened our democracy.
- And let’s not forget that Mr. Huckabee has publicly shared suggestions for suppressing voting rights using fraud and trickery.

Dr. King spent 10 of his final 13 years inspiring the nation to act on civil rights through non-violence, including the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. In fact, the King family has requested that observances of this year's King Holiday be devoted to supporting the passage of the Voting Rights Act. Considering this request by Dr. King's heirs, the selection of Mr. Huckabee becomes even more difficult to understand.

Finally, the simple fact that the invited speaker is the father of an announced candidate for governor begs the question, "why would the Commission politicize a spiritual event this year and at this time when our nation is so divided over politics?"

As leaders in this community, we will not sit politely by and allow this event to occur without denouncing this choice. We must devoid this event of any positive value and stand up in dignity rather than sit silently in frustration. We will not attend this year's Prayer Breakfast. Instead, we will join allies from across Arkansas in honoring Dr. King's legacy through service to our communities. We call on all Arkansans who support our stand to skip the "invitation only" event and to let the MLK Commission know they should do better. Call them at 501-683-1300 or email them at [Dushun.Scarbrough@ade.arkansas.gov](mailto:Dushun.Scarbrough@ade.arkansas.gov).

We must do what is right in the memory of Dr. King and if he was alive today, we have no doubt he would agree.

#### **About the Arkansas Democratic Black Caucus**

The Arkansas Democratic Black Caucus was established in 1982 as an extension of the Democratic Party of Arkansas. It provides a vehicle, within the Democratic Party of Arkansas, to address the concerns of African-Americans. The objective of this organization is to achieve proportionate representation of African-American Democratic public officials, elected or appointed in Arkansas; foster election of and monitor the performance of all elected officials and disseminate information to the African-American community through effective communication.

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