

AMENDED IN SENATE APRIL 7, 2025

**SENATE BILL**

**No. 518**

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**Introduced by Senator Weber Pierson**

**(Coauthors: Senators Richardson and Smallwood-Cuevas)**

(Coauthors: Assembly Members Bonta, Bryan, Elhawary, Gipson,  
Jackson, McKinnor, Ransom, Sharp-Collins, and Wilson)

February 19, 2025

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An act to ~~amend Section 11041 of, and to add Part 15 (commencing with Section 16000) to amend Section 15002.5 of, and to add Chapter 4 (commencing with Section 15210) to Part 6 of Division 3 of Title 2~~ of, the Government Code, relating to state government.

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

SB 518, as amended, Weber Pierson. Descendants of enslaved persons: reparations.

Former law, until July 1, 2023, established the Task Force to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans, with a Special Consideration for African Americans Who are Descendants of Persons Enslaved in the United States (Task Force).

Former law required the Task Force, among other things, to identify, compile, and synthesize the relevant corpus of evidentiary documentation of the institution of slavery that existed within the United States and the colonies, as specified, and to recommend the form of compensation that should be awarded, the instrumentalities through which it should be awarded, and who should be eligible for this compensation.

This bill would establish the Bureau for Descendants of American Slavery ~~within state government, the Department of Justice, under the control of the director, who would be appointed by the Governor~~

*Attorney General* and confirmed by the Senate. The bill would require the bureau, as part of its duties, to determine how an individual's status as a descendant would be confirmed. The bill would also require proof of an individual's descendant status to be a qualifying criterion for benefits authorized by the state for descendants. To accomplish these goals, the bill would require the bureau to be comprised of a Genealogy Division, a Property Reclamation Division, an Education and Outreach Division, and a Legal Affairs Division.

~~Existing law prohibits a state agency, with certain exceptions, from employing any in-house counsel to act on behalf of the state agency or its employees in any judicial or administrative adjudicative proceeding in which the agency is interested, or is a party as a result of office or official duties, or contracting with outside counsel for any purpose.~~

~~This bill would exempt the bureau from those prohibitions.~~

Vote: majority. Appropriation: no. Fiscal committee: yes.  
State-mandated local program: no.

*The people of the State of California do enact as follows:*

- 1     ~~SECTION 1. Section 11041 of the Government Code is~~
- 2     ~~amended to read:~~
- 3     ~~11041. (a) Section 11042 does not apply to the Regents of the~~
- 4     ~~University of California, the Trustees of the California State~~
- 5     ~~University, Legal Division of the Department of Transportation,~~
- 6     ~~Division of Labor Standards Enforcement of the Department of~~
- 7     ~~Industrial Relations, Workers' Compensation Appeals Board,~~
- 8     ~~Public Utilities Commission, State Compensation Insurance Fund,~~
- 9     ~~Legislative Counsel Bureau, Inheritance Tax Department, Secretary~~
- 10    ~~of State, State Lands Commission, Alcoholic Beverage Control~~
- 11    ~~Appeals Board (except when the board affirms the decision of the~~
- 12    ~~Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control), Department of~~
- 13    ~~Cannabis Control (except in proceedings in state or federal court),~~
- 14    ~~State Department of Education, Department of Financial Protection~~
- 15    ~~and Innovation, Bureau for Descendants of American Slavery, and~~
- 16    ~~Treasurer with respect to bonds, nor to any other state agency~~
- 17    ~~which, by law enacted after Chapter 213 of the Statutes of 1933,~~
- 18    ~~is authorized to employ legal counsel.~~
- 19    ~~(b) The Trustees of the California State University shall pay the~~
- 20    ~~cost of employing legal counsel from their existing resources.~~

1     ~~SEC. 2.—Part 15 (commencing with Section 16000) is added to~~  
2     ~~Division 3 of Title 2 of the Government Code, to read:~~

3  
4     ~~PART 15. BUREAU FOR DESCENDANTS OF AMERICAN~~  
5             ~~SLAVERY~~

6  
7             ~~CHAPTER 1. DEFINITIONS~~

8  
9     ~~SECTION 1. Section 15002.5 of the Government Code is~~  
10    ~~amended to read:~~

11     ~~15002.5. The Except as provided in Chapter 4 (commencing~~  
12    ~~with Section 15210), the Attorney General may arrange and classify~~  
13    ~~the work of the Department of Justice, and consolidate, abolish,~~  
14    ~~or create divisions, bureaus, branches, sections, or units within the~~  
15    ~~department. Any statutory or other reference to the Office of the~~  
16    ~~Attorney General, the State Bureau of Criminal Identification and~~  
17    ~~Investigation, the Division of Law Enforcement, or the Bureau of~~  
18    ~~Gambling Control shall be construed to refer to the division,~~  
19    ~~bureau, branch, section, or unit within the department which is~~  
20    ~~performing the functions referred to; and no such function shall~~  
21    ~~be abolished without express statutory authority.~~

22     ~~SEC. 2. Chapter 4 (commencing with Section 15210) is added~~  
23    ~~to Part 6 of Division 3 of Title 2 of the Government Code, to read:~~

24  
25     ~~CHAPTER 4. BUREAU FOR DESCENDANTS OF AMERICAN SLAVERY~~

26  
27     ~~15210. (a) It is the intent of the Legislature in establishing the~~  
28    ~~bureau to establish an initial framework and it is the intent of the~~  
29    ~~Legislature that the scope and responsibilities of the bureau may~~  
30    ~~expand as necessary to fulfill its mission and address additional~~  
31    ~~harms as identified.~~

32     ~~(b) It is the intent of the Legislature that, as the bureau expands~~  
33    ~~its scope in the future, it shall also advise on reparative remedies~~  
34    ~~for the African American community to address the lasting harms~~  
35    ~~of disenfranchisement, segregation, discrimination, exclusion~~  
36    ~~neglect, violence, and the persistent consequences of this legacy.~~

37     ~~16000.~~

38     ~~15211. For purposes of this part: chapter:~~

39     ~~(a) “Bureau” means the Bureau for Descendants of American~~  
40    ~~Slavery.~~

(b) “Descendants” means descendants of an African American chattel enslaved person in the United States, or descendants of a free Black person living in the United States prior to the end of the 19th century.

(c) “Director” means the Director of the Bureau *for Descendants of American Slavery*.

(d) “*Racially motivated eminent domain*” means when the state, county, city, city and county, district, or other political subdivision of the state acquires private property for public use and does not distribute just compensation to the owner at the time of the acquisition, and the acquisition or the failure to provide just compensation was due, in whole or in part, to the owner’s ethnicity or race.

## ~~CHAPTER 2. GENERAL~~

~~16001.—~~

15212. (a) ~~The Notwithstanding Section 15002.5, the Bureau for Descendants of American Slavery is hereby established within state government. the Department of Justice.~~ The bureau shall be under the direct control of a director who shall be responsible to the ~~Governor.~~ Attorney General.

(b) The director shall be appointed by the ~~Governor~~ Attorney General and confirmed by the Senate, and shall perform all duties, exercise all powers, assume and discharge all responsibilities, and carry out and effect all purposes vested by law in the bureau.

(c) The salary of the director shall be fixed pursuant to Section ~~12001.~~ 12502.

(d) *The bureau shall establish a mission statement consistent with the recommendations from the former Task Force to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans, with a Special Consideration for African Americans Who are Descendants of Persons Enslaved in the United States.*

## ~~CHAPTER 3. POWERS AND DUTIES~~

~~16002.—~~

15213. As part of its duties, the bureau shall determine how an individual’s status as a descendant shall be confirmed. Proof of an individual’s descendent status shall be a qualifying ~~criteria~~

1 *criterion* for benefits authorized by the state for descendants. To  
2 accomplish these goals, the bureau shall include all of the following  
3 divisions:

4 (a) A Genealogy Division to do ~~both~~ *all* of the following:

5 (1) Establish a process to certify descendants of American  
6 slaves.

7 (2) Create a method for eligible individuals to submit claims  
8 and receive compensation or restitution for those particular harms  
9 California inflicted upon the claimant or their family.

10 (3) *Establish an equitable alternative qualifying criterion for*  
11 *benefits for descendants authorized by the state in cases where an*  
12 *individual's status as a descendant cannot be confirmed or proven.*

13 (b) A Property Reclamation Division to do all of the following:

14 ~~(1) Create a database of property ownership in the state.~~

15 ~~(2)~~

16 (1) Research and document California state properties acquired  
17 as a result of racially-motivated eminent domain, including  
18 properties that no longer exist due to state highway construction  
19 or other development.

20 (2) *Create a database of property ownership in the state*  
21 *identifying properties acquired through racially motivated eminent*  
22 *domain or other discriminatory government action.*

23 (3) Review and investigate public complaints from people who  
24 claim their property was taken without just compensation.

25 (4) Upon appropriation, distribute just compensation for the fair  
26 market value, adjusted for property price appreciation, of the  
27 property at the time of the taking.

28 (5) *Address cases where individuals experienced harm due to*  
29 *the policies and practices of state and local agencies.*

30 (c) An Education and Outreach Division to develop and  
31 implement a public education campaign regarding the cycle of  
32 gentrification, displacement, and exclusion; the connection between  
33 redlining and gentrification; and the history of discriminatory urban  
34 planning in California.

35 (d) A Legal Affairs Division to ~~provide~~ *do all of the following:*

36 (1) *Provide* legal advice, counsel, and services to the bureau  
37 and its officials, ~~and to ensure officials.~~

38 (2) *Ensure* that the bureau's programs are administered in  
39 accordance with applicable legislative authority. ~~The division shall~~  
40 ~~also advise~~

1     (3) *Advise* the head of the bureau on legislative, legal, and  
2 regulatory ~~initiatives and serve initiatives.~~

3     (4) *Serve* as an external liaison on legal matters with other state  
4 agencies and other entities.

5     (5) *Conduct a review of past and current laws, as well as*  
6 *proposed legislation, to determine whether those measures have*  
7 *caused, are causing, or may continue to cause harm. The division*  
8 *shall provide recommendations to mitigate or eliminate any harm*  
9 *identified in its review.*