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AB 2723 – California Freedmen Affairs: Genealogy

Summary:

This bill establishes the California American Freedmen Affairs Division within the Secretary of State's office to verify residency status as an American Freedman and to maintain a secure registry. The bill creates a dedicated Genealogy Office to assist residents in documenting lineage and ensuring accurate historical verification. Housing the division within the Secretary of State, which holds the California State Archives, recognizes the importance of genealogy, historical records, and archival expertise in preserving identity and strengthening communities.

Existing Law:

SB 518 established the Bureau for Descendants of American Slavery within the Civil Rights Department to verify an individual's status as a descendant of an enslaved person and to create divisions for genealogy, education and outreach, and legal affairs. That bureau operates within the Civil Rights Department's administrative structure. AB 2723 instead establishes the division within the Secretary of State's office, grounding the work in archival research and registry functions consistent with the Secretary of State's responsibility for maintaining the State Archives

Problem:

Genealogy plays a critical role in helping individuals and communities understand their

history, preserve cultural identity, and access policies designed to serve them. Across all communities, accurate lineage documentation can affect eligibility for programs, representation, and historical recognition. Without a structured process supported by archival and historical expertise, residents face barriers in documenting ancestry and accessing coordinated state support.

Solution:

This bill creates the California American Freedmen Affairs Division within the Secretary of State's office to establish a centralized, credible process for verifying American Freedmen status and maintaining an official registry. It also establishes an American Freedmen Genealogy Office by July 1, 2028, to develop uniform verification standards and assist residents in documenting lineage.

By housing the division within the Secretary of State, which maintains the California State Archives, the bill ensures that verification and registry functions are grounded in official records, archival expertise, and long-term record preservation.

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