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**CONTACT**

Anika Hamilton  
Office of Representative Geraldine Thompson  
[Anika.Hamilton@myfloridahouse.gov](mailto:Anika.Hamilton@myfloridahouse.gov)  
(850) 717-5044

**Representative Geraldine Thompson Salutes Back History**

**TALLAHASSEE, Fla.** - Members of the Florida Legislative Black Caucus will be joined by Speaker of the Florida House, **the Honorable Chris Sprowls**, and Interim President of Bethune Cookman University, **Dr. Hiram Powell** during a Black History Month Salute to the Florida Legislature and **Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune** on Thursday, Feb. 17, 2022 from 6 to 8 p.m. in room 314 of the House Office Building of the State Capitol.

The event was coordinated by State Representative and former **Senator Geraldine F. Thompson** who serves as Historian to the Florida Legislative Black Caucus. **Representative Thompson** stated that the salute celebrates the placement of a statue of **Dr. Bethune** as one of two to represent Florida in the **National Statuary Hall** in the U.S. Capitol Building.

Members of the Florida Legislature voted in 2017 to be represented in **Statuary Hall** by **Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune**, thereby claiming the distinction of being the only state in the Nation to vote to be represented in Statuary Hall by an African American woman. The statue of **Dr. Bethune** was carved in Pietrasanta, Italy by sculptor **Nilda Comas**, the first Hispanic sculptor chosen to create a piece for the National Statuary Hall. Comas was one of 1,600 applicants who responded to a call for artists from the Florida Division of Cultural Affairs. Of the 10 finalists selected, she was the only female artist. The statue of **Dr. Bethune** was carved from marble culled from the same Tuscan quarry Michelangelo used for his masterpiece statue of David around the year 1500.

The Bethune statue was temporarily displayed in Daytona before it transported to Washington, D.C. for placement in Statuary Hall. A life size reproduction of the statue will be on display during the February 17th Black History Month Salute as will other exhibits that highlight the contributions of **Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune** and her journey to **Statuary Hall**. The Florida Legislative Black Caucus Black History Salute is free and open to the public; however, attendees as asked to register at [FLBlackCaucus.com/Black-History-Programs](https://FLBlackCaucus.com/Black-History-Programs).

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