FAMU to form Alliance to Address Infant Mortality Crisis

Tallahassee, Fla. —President James H. Ammons announced today that Florida A&M University (FAMU) will form an alliance with campus health care experts, researchers, and local, state and national organizations to address the Infant Mortality Crisis in Leon County. He is calling the group the FAMU Black Infant Health Alliance.

During the press conference, the State Surgeon General of the Florida Department of Health Ana M. Viamonte Ros pledged her support of the initiative.

"We are pleased that Dr. Ammons has step forward to address this matter," said Viamonte Ros. "We are committed to being a partner."

Ammons says the high infant mortality rate among African Americans threatens the stability and future of African Americans. He wants to bring campus health care professionals and others on campus together to strengthen FAMU's impact and efforts to address this crisis. He would be relying heavily on the College of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences, the School of Allied Health Sciences and the School of Nursing as resources.

"In as much as this crisis is in the shadows of the Florida A&M University community, we feel that it is our duty to engage all relative departments at the university and others with great interest in addressing this crisis," said Ammons. "We will join forces with state, national and local organizations and coalitions to develop strategies that will address this crisis. Infant mortality is a crucial issue that the university must embrace. We want to take the lead and have impact."

Ammons has asked Cynthia Hughes-Harris, dean of the School of Allied Health Sciences, and Dr. Joseph Webster, of the Webster Surgical Center in Tallahassee, to co-chair the alliance that would convene a think tank in January. The think tank on "Health Care: Infant Mortality Crisis in Leon County" will bring members of the alliance together to identify resources and develop goals and objectives. Dr. Ammons believes this alliance will be able to develop a plan that will be effective in addressing the crisis.

"Community leaders, healthcare professionals and county leaders have expressed there is indeed a crisis and a solution to this problem is imperative," said Ammons. "Although there are no immediate answers to the high rate of infant mortality in Leon County, this alliance will be used to address and obtain viable measures to decrease the number of infant deaths in the county. If we do not assemble scholars to review a life and death issue affecting the future of our communities, then we would reduce the meaning and impact that an institution of higher learning should have in its community and state."

Several organizations have agreed to support this alliance, including the Florida Department of Health, Tallahassee Health Equity Alliance Team, the Institute of African American Health, the Gunn Society, and Bond Community Health Center. Commissioner Bill Proctor has agreed to work closely with the alliance, as well as, Charles Evans, who will represent the State Chapter of the NAACP; Eunice Cofie, Miss Black Florida USA; and Dr. Nelson L. Adams, M.D., president of the National Medical Association.

"FAMU has a right and obligation to take a stand," said Dr. Joseph Webster. "I commend Dr. Ammons for taking that stand and thank him for his vision. Today, we stand ready to lead this alliance."

"There is a need to develop programs and coordinate resources," said Proctor. "The educational entities must become involved to improve health care access. The university will empower this initiative and find practical solutions to decrease the number of infant deaths in Leon County."

PHOTO CAPTION: FAMU President James H. Ammons announces the alliance to address the infant mortality crisis. Supporters of the alliance include (from left to right) Charles Evans, president of the Tallahassee Branch of the NAACP; Yolanda Bogan, director of FAMU's Counseling Center; Fran Close, assistant professor of behavioral science and health education; Jean Kline, representative from the Florida Department of Health; Ed Dixon, county commissioner for Gadsden County; and State Surgeon General of the Florida Department of Health Ana M. Viamonte Ros.