



# Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University

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## BOARD OF TRUSTEES

August 21, 2017

Chancellor Marshall Criser III  
State University System of Florida  
Board of Governors  
325 W. Gaines Street  
Tallahassee, Florida 32399

Dear Chancellor Criser:

Thank you for providing the Florida A&M University Board of Trustees (FAMU BOT) with this opportunity to discuss the granting of an exception to Florida Board of Governors (BOG) Regulation 1.0012, which details the selection for a State University System of Florida president when there is a vacancy.

This letter comes in light of a recent decision by the FAMU BOT, which voted unanimously, 11-0 (one member was absent), to ask the BOG for the waiver regarding its presidential search process. We are requesting the flexibility to either conduct a national search or select our current interim president as the permanent president.

If our request is granted, we will have the maximum flexibility to make a decision that the total board will feel is in the best interest of FAMU. A national search sends a signal to our stakeholders and supporters that we are not comfortable with our current leadership. This cannot be farther from the truth; we are very comfortable with Dr. Larry Robinson's leadership and believe that he is an outstanding candidate for the permanent president role.

This is a rather complex issue, and I cannot speak for the entire board. My role here is to provide our board with the best path forward on a complicated and dynamic issue. No other institution in the system has had the level of change at the CEO level while still managing to make progress. No other institution in Florida has sought the same individual for three interim presidencies.

FAMU, some would say, is at one of the most significant crossroads in its history. Competent, strong, trusted, steady and thoughtful leadership can keep FAMU on a path of upward progress. A shortsighted decision could send our institution into a tailspin that would challenge human and financial resources.

Our board is strongly considering Dr. Robinson as a viable presidential candidate because of the level of competent leadership he has demonstrated. Over the past ten years, FAMU has had two permanent presidents and an interim president, Dr. Robinson, who has served three separate terms — briefly in 2007, from 2012 -2014 and from 2016 to the present. He has been called on time and time again to maintain some semblance of normality in times of controversy and transition.

During his first term as interim in 2007, he provided leadership during a brief period when the university was placed on probation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges. This happened weeks before the start of former President James H. Ammons' term. In 2012, following the resignation of Dr. Ammons, after the band-hazing crisis, Dr. Robinson provided leadership for the development of new guidelines and processes, which led to the return of the FAMU Marching Band. Most recently, he was appointed interim president in September 2016 after the departure of former FAMU President Elmira Magnum.

Since his appointment in 2016, Dr. Robinson has worked with faculty and staff to provide meaningful leadership, while continuing our efforts to meet the Board of Governors performance metrics in the FAMU Work Plan.

A member of the faculty since 1977, Dr. Robinson became FAMU's provost and vice president for academic affairs in 2003, serving until 2005. In 2007, Dr. Robinson became the university's chief operating officer and vice president for research under Dr. Ammons' administration.

Three years later, Dr. Robinson left that position to accept a Presidential appointment as Assistant Secretary for Conservation and Management in the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. In November 2011, he returned to FAMU as a professor and special assistant to former President Ammons. Dr. Robinson is well suited for consideration as a candidate to lead this institution, which will celebrate its 130<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year.

His experience and proven leadership skills meet the criteria for the FAMU presidency and are in line with the characteristics that an independent consultant helped the Board to develop after meetings with stakeholders, including the FAMU National Alumni Association (NAA), students, faculty and the FAMU Faculty Senate. The FAMU BOT also agrees that Dr. Robinson has those characteristics.

Dr. Robinson has garnered overwhelming support from FAMU stakeholders — the FAMU NAA, faculty, staff and students. The FAMU Foundation Board and FAMU NAA members endorsed him at the NAA's annual convention in Baltimore earlier this year.

Your assistance in considering this request would be highly appreciated. I respectfully ask that this item be placed on the BOG's agenda for consideration when the board convenes next week in Gainesville.

Sincerely,



Kelvin Lawson  
Chairman

cc: Mr. Thomas G. Kuntz, Chairman of the State University System of Florida  
Atty. Vikki Shirley, General Counsel and Corporate Secretary for the Board of Governors  
Atty. Shira Thomas, General Counsel for Florida A&M University