



For Immediate Release
Thursday, May 25, 2017

Contact: David Jacobs
212-965-2255 / djacobs@naacpldf.org

NAACP Legal Defense Fund Statement on Alabama Governor Signing Bill Enfranchising Thousands

Late yesterday, Alabama Governor Kay Ivey signed into law the Definition of Moral Turpitude Act, restoring voting rights to thousands of citizens who were previously disenfranchised. Until now, Alabama law did not define which felonies involve “moral turpitude,” a condition that carried with it automatic disqualification from voting. For decades, the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF) has challenged Alabama’s unconstitutional and vague definition of moral turpitude, and we are pleased to see this bill become law. LDF President and Director-Counsel [Sherrilyn Ifill](#) released the following statement in response:

“We commend Governor Ivey and the Alabama State Legislature for recognizing that Alabama law left the voting rights of too many citizens – especially Black citizens – hanging in the balance because of a legal ambiguity. With the stroke of a pen, Governor Ivey has taken a significant step towards making Alabama’s democracy more vital. This bill is only a start, however. LDF strongly believes that no citizen should be disenfranchised for any kind of criminal conviction. Nevertheless, this is a significant day for voting rights in Alabama.

“While the federal government is consumed with the dangerous myth of voter fraud and further limiting the franchise, we encourage state and local officials around the country to enact measures that will expand the right to vote. We call on Alabama in particular to build on this momentum by supporting a bill that would repeal their restrictive photo ID law which, according to experts, negatively affected 118,000 voters who lacked adequate identification in 2016.”

In 2005, LDF filed *Gooden v. Worley* (later renamed *Chapman v. Gooden*) to compel Alabama to define ‘moral turpitude’ and apply a uniform standard for registering all eligible voters with felony convictions. The State Supreme Court ultimately dismissed the case, but validated LDF’s concerns that the ‘moral turpitude’ clause had been applied arbitrarily to the plaintiffs. In 2008, LDF filed litigation that resulted in the Alabama Department of Corrections taking steps to affirmatively encourage the registration of eligible voters who are held in state prisons. These cases built on our 1985 [amicus brief](#) in the landmark case of [Hunter v. Underwood](#), where the U.S. Supreme Court found that the racist 1901 Alabama Constitutional Convention had purposely defined crimes of ‘moral turpitude’ to disproportionately disfranchise African Americans.

LDF is currently challenging Alabama’s stringent photo ID law in [Greater Birmingham Ministries v. Merrill](#).

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Founded in 1940, the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF) is the nation's first civil and human rights law organization and has been completely separate from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) since 1957—although LDF was originally founded by the NAACP and shares its commitment to equal rights. LDF's Thurgood Marshall Institute is a multi-disciplinary and collaborative hub within LDF that launches targeted campaigns and undertakes innovative research to shape the civil rights narrative. In media attributions, please refer to us as the NAACP Legal Defense Fund or LDF.