LDF Supports Florida State Attorney Aramis Ayala in Historic Decision to Not Seek the Death Penalty in Future Capital Cases

The NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF) strongly supports today’s announcement, by Florida State Attorney, Aramis Ayala, that she will not seek the death penalty in any future capital cases, and will not pursue the death penalty in the 11 cases where death sentences were overturned pursuant to Hurst v. Florida, a United States Supreme Court case which declared that Florida’s system of allowing judges instead of juries to impose death penalty sentences unconstitutionally violates the Sixth Amendment.

“State Attorney Aramis Ayala’s acknowledgment that the death penalty system is irreparably broken puts her at the forefront of smart-on-crime prosecutors,” said Sherrilyn Ifill, President and Director-Counsel of LDF. “Just weeks ago, the Supreme Court decided that the capital sentencing hearing of LDF client Duane Buck, was unconstitutionally tainted with racial bias – and unfortunately, Mr. Buck’s case does not stand alone. Given the persistent racial disproportionality in the administration of the death penalty, the research showing that the death penalty does not deter crime, and the fact that capital cases are unjustifiably expensive given their reversal rate and the very real prospect of wrongful conviction and execution, Ms. Ayala properly concluded that it is time for Florida to stop tinkering with the machinery of death. Other prosecutors would be wise to follow her lead.”

Aramis Ayala, the first African-American State Attorney elected in the state of Florida, is the chief prosecutor for Orange and Osceola Counties in Florida. Orange County is one of the four (of 67) Florida counties that have produced more than five executions since 1976 and one of ten Florida’s counties, that when combined, are responsible for more than half of the state’s death row population. Only five percent of all counties nationwide have returned one or more death sentences since 2012.

LDF has been a leader in challenging the constitutionality of the death penalty since its founding. Our founder Thurgood Marshall defended numerous Black men facing executions in the South, including the Groveland Boys in 1951, falsely accused of raping a white woman in Florida.

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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.