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African-American Civil Rights Leaders Strongly Urge Attorney General Sessions to Include Civil Rights in DOJ’s Priorities

African-American civil rights leaders sent a joint letter strongly urging U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions not to alter the Department of Justice’s (DOJ) historic commitment to the civil rights laws that Congress tasked it with enforcing. The draft strategic plan, which leaked to media outlets last week, reportedly indicates that enforcing these core civil rights statutes is, remarkably, not among DOJ’s priorities. The joint letter, which was signed by organizations representing predominantly African-American stakeholders, calls on the Department not to shun its legal and moral responsibility to protect our fundamental rights.

"Aggressively enforcing our civil rights laws is essential to ensuring equal opportunity and addressing discrimination in our schools, neighborhoods, places of work, voting booths, and criminal justice system," said Sherrilyn Ifill, President and Director-Counsel of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF). "The Attorney General has a legal obligation to protect our fundamental rights, and we will not stand idly by as he attempts to write civil rights out of the Department’s portfolio."

The letter was co-authored by Sherrilyn Ifill, President and Director-Counsel of LDF; Kristen Clarke, President and Executive Director of the Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law; Marc Morial, President and CEO of the National Urban League; Derrick Johnson, President and CEO of the NAACP; Reverend Al Sharpton, President and Founder of the National Action Network; and Melanie L. Campbell, President and CEO of the National Coalition for Black Civic Participation and Black Women’s Roundtable.

Read the full letter here.

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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.*