Christina A. Swarns to Step Down as LDF Litigation Director

Will Be Succeeded by Samuel Spital

After 14 years with the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF) – the last three as Litigation Director – Christina A. Swarns is leaving LDF to lead the Office of the Appellate Defender of New York City, LDF President and Director-Counsel Sherrilyn Ifill announced today. Ms. Ifill also announced that Ms. Swarns will be succeeded as Litigation Director by Samuel Spital, who was recently hired by LDF as Director of Appellate Advocacy.

"Those who have had the privilege to work alongside Christina Swarns know the brilliance, the toughness, and the compassion she brings to her work for equal justice," Ms. Ifill said. "Her talents drew national attention last year when she argued the Buck v. Davis case before the United States Supreme Court. Representing LDF client Duane Buck – who had been sentenced to death in Texas after his own trial attorneys introduced an expert who testified that Mr. Buck was more likely to be dangerous in the future because he is Black – Christina delivered a powerful and compelling oral argument, and secured a 6-2 decision, authored by Chief Justice John Roberts, that saved Mr. Buck’s life.

"Of course, Christina’s contributions extend far beyond the courtroom. She is an inspiration to her friends and colleagues, and her career stands as a powerful example of what it means to use the law in service of the public interest. LDF is a stronger organization because of her time here, and I know she will thrive in her new role. I thank Christina for her exemplary service to LDF, and I wish her the very best in this exciting new chapter."

Mr. Spital, the new Litigation Director, comes to LDF from the law firm of Holland & Knight, where he is a partner.

“Our timing in hiring Sam could not have been more fortuitous,” Ms. Ifill said. “Sam is one of LDF’s longstanding cooperating attorneys, and he is brilliant. He not only worked with Christina on the Buck case, he worked with LDF attorneys on Shelby County v. Holder and Northwest Austin Municipal Utility District v. Holder, two seminal voting rights cases that LDF also litigated in the Supreme Court. We were thrilled to hire him as the Director of Appellate Advocacy. And when the Litigation Director position became available, we knew that we needed to look no further than Sam.”

Mr. Spital comes to LDF with over a decade of experience litigating civil rights cases at both the trial and appellate level. He served as a law clerk to Judge Harry Edwards of the U.S. Court of
Appeals for the D.C. Circuit and to Justice John Paul Stevens of the U.S. Supreme Court. He has worked on United States Supreme Court cases involving indigent defense and voting rights, post-conviction appeals of capital cases, and challenges to racial discrimination in the criminal justice system. Sam has also argued cases before the U.S. Courts of Appeal for the Second, Fifth, and Eleventh Circuits.

Sam is a graduate of Harvard College and Harvard Law School. He will be based in LDF’s New York office.

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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.