NAACP Legal Defense Fund Statement on HBCU Executive Order

Race-Conscious Policies Key to Educational Equality

Today, the White House issued an executive order elevating an initiative to promote excellence and innovation at our nations’ Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). The NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF) offered the following statement:

“Support for HBCUs and providing quality educational opportunities to African Americans is vital. Indeed, in the wake of state-sponsored racial segregation, HBCUs provided African Americans access to higher education when established colleges and universities closed their doors to Black students. We applaud the creation of the White House Initiative to Promote Excellence and Innovation at Historically Black Colleges and Universities to strengthen the capacity of our nations’ HBCUs.

“Strengthening access to quality, higher education opportunities for all students lies at the core part of our mission, and we are uniquely situated to recognize the challenges inherent in achieving this goal. We encourage the President to recognize that every HBCU resides within a community that faces challenges. Thus, strengthening HBCUs also requires strengthening the communities that surround those schools. This includes strengthening public K-12 education and community colleges.

“In addition, we also encourage the President to recognize that HBCUs exist within a higher education ecosystem that must also be strengthened. To do so requires protecting African American students from fraudulent “for-profit” colleges that prey on bright, ambitious African American men and women and steer them away from the quality education they can receive at HBCUs. We encourage the President to holistically embrace the vitality of HBCUs by taking on these measures.

“Moreover, any effort to promote opportunities for African American students to attend college should also include support for affirmative action measures that encourage access to our nation’s non-HBCU universities like Harvard and University of Texas. Thus, we expect that the Administration also intends to support the ability of African Americans to attend majority white universities and colleges in our country, by continuing to support affirmative action measures like those recently upheld by the United States Supreme Court.

“LDF is committed to the principle of equality and has long blazed trails for integration. Our litigators worked to successfully desegregate universities in almost every state in the south. Our founder, Thurgood Marshall, was a proud graduate of two HBCUs, Lincoln University and Howard University Law School. Our staff is comprised of the best and brightest – graduates from HBCUs like Howard and Hampton Universities, as well as from majority white universities such as Harvard and Yale. We also provide scholarship opportunities to students who are committed to the fight for equality and racial
justice from many institutions nationwide, including many attendees of HBCUs. We look forward to making progress on providing access to quality, affordable university education for all students.”

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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.*