NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund Commends USDOT on Agreement to Restore Driver’s License Issuing Offices in Alabama’s Majority Black Counties

Today, the U.S. Department of Transportation and the Alabama Law Enforcement Agency (ALEA), Alabama’s department of motor vehicles, entered an agreement that fully restores the hours of driver’s license issuing offices in nine predominately African-American counties in the “Black Belt.” In addition, for the next two years, the agreement requires ALEA to seek pre-approval from the U.S. Department of Transportation before initiating any driver’s license office closures or other reductions in service.

This important agreement comes one year after the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF), Covington and Burling, LLP, and local counsel Herman N. Johnson, Jr. filed a lawsuit on behalf of Greater Birmingham Ministries, the Alabama NAACP, and four individual voters challenging Alabama’s Photo ID Law and the ALEA office closings as violations of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and the U.S. Constitution. Prior to filing the lawsuit, LDF also sent a letter on behalf of Greater Birmingham Ministries and the Alabama NAACP opposing the ALEA office closures. The U.S. Department of Transportation’s findings validate the necessity of this lawsuit and confirm the significant hurdles that our clients and other Black and Latino Alabamians face in getting the photo ID needed to vote. These findings also prove that Alabama was wrong in repeatedly arguing that the ALEA closures did not have a disparate impact on Black voters. LDF’s lawsuit will continue to press for the elimination the Photo ID Law, a discriminatory barrier to voting for thousands of people of color.

“Alabama’s decision in 2015 to close driver’s license offices in most of its majority Black counties was an egregious act of racial discrimination,” said Sherrilyn A. Ifill, LDF’s President and Director Counsel. “The ALEA office closings severely limited Black people’s access to transportation and to the photo ID needed to vote. These findings also prove that Alabama was wrong in repeatedly arguing that the ALEA closures did not have a disparate impact on Black voters. LDF’s lawsuit will continue to press for the elimination the Photo ID Law, a discriminatory barrier to voting for thousands of people of color.”

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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.