Civil Rights & Criminal Justice Reform Organizations File Amicus Brief in Louisiana Felony Disenfranchisement Case

Yesterday, the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF), The Sentencing Project, and the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), filed an amicus brief in a Louisiana appellate court in support of plaintiffs-appellants, who are challenging Louisiana’s felony disenfranchisement policy. More than 71,000 Louisianans under probation or parole supervision are prohibited from voting, disproportionately harming Black Louisianans.

The amicus brief provides historical context for the racial discrimination inherent in felony disfranchisement laws, including Louisiana’s, and explains the present-day impact of such laws, on the Black community in Louisiana, particularly.

Louisiana has the country’s highest incarceration rate, imprisoning a greater share of its citizens than any other state. Compounding this reality, from arrest to incarceration, Black Louisianans are disproportionately represented at every level of the state’s criminal justice system. Because of these racial disparities, Black people, who account for 32 percent of the state population, make up 63 percent of individuals who have lost their voting rights through the state’s disenfranchisement law. At issue in the lawsuit, Vote v. Louisiana, is a group of those disenfranchised, disproportionately Black individuals, on parole and probation and seeking to be full citizens in their communities.

“After the Civil War, Louisiana and other states passed felony disenfranchisement laws, alongside voter qualifications that are now illegal like literacy tests, poll taxes, and lengthy residency requirements, with an intent to exclude Black and other people from the political process,” said Leah Aden, senior counsel at LDF. “The successor felony disenfranchisement laws that legislatures in Louisiana and elsewhere adopted, continue—whether in design or effect—to have a disproportionate impact on Black Louisianans’ ability to exercise their fundamental right to vote.”

“Felony disenfranchisement laws prevent the very people who are likely be the most knowledgeable about injustices in the criminal justice system from voting for representatives of their choice who have the power to fix those injustices,” added Ajmel Quereshi, senior counsel at LDF. “To deny people with felony convictions of the
fundamental right to vote is at odds with ample evidence showing that the expansion of voting rights not only leads to safer communities, but has widespread public support.”

“Nationally, six million Americans are barred from voting due to a current or past felony conviction,” stated Marc Mauer, Executive Director of The Sentencing Project. “As is true in Louisiana, the vast majority of these people are living in the community, yet are still treated as ‘second class citizens’ due to the denial of this fundamental right of citizenship.”

“Racial disparities infect every stage of the criminal justice system, and that is especially true in the South,” said Lisa Graybill, Deputy Legal Director at SPLC. “The State of Louisiana must stop the unconstitutional practice of denying the right to vote to men and women who have completed their sentences and returned home to their communities.”

Read the full brief here.

###

*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.*

*Founded in 1986, The Sentencing Project works for a fair and effective U.S. criminal justice system by promoting reforms in sentencing policy, addressing unjust racial disparities and practices, and advocating for alternatives to incarceration. To learn more about The Sentencing Projects’ work on felony disenfranchisement visit [http://www.sentencingproject.org/issues/felony-disenfranchisement/](http://www.sentencingproject.org/issues/felony-disenfranchisement/)*

*Since its founding in 1971, SPLC has been dedicated to fighting hate and bigotry, and to seeking justice for the most vulnerable members of society. To learn more about SPLC, visit [https://www.splcenter.org/](https://www.splcenter.org/)*