STATEMENT OF SUPPORT FROM THE LOUIS A. MARTINET LEGAL SOCIETY ON THE CREATION OF MAJORITY-MINORITY SUB-DISTRICT IN TERREBONNE PARISH

TERREBONNE – On Monday, the Louis A. Martinet Legal Society released a statement in support of the creation of a majority-minority sub-district in Terrebonne Parish (32nd Judicial District Court). In 2014, the Terrebonne Parish chapter of the NAACP filed a federal lawsuit under the Voting Rights Act and the U.S. Constitution, in the U.S. District Court in Baton Rouge that aims to alter the at-large voting system to a district-based method in an effort to create a minority sub-district. The proposed system would include five single-member districts for judges, including one with a voter majority of blacks and other minorities.

The Martinet Society also rejects the inappropriate comments made by several sitting judges of the 32nd Judicial District Court (JDC), while testifying as defense witnesses at trial.

At trial, a sitting 32nd JDC judge testified that creating a minority sub-district “would be institutionalizing racism in the judicial election process.” Another 32nd JDC judge testified in reference to a minority sub-district that, “If you limit it to people just living in that district to vote for a judge, you risk having someone winning who’s not qualified.”

These statements are a direct contradiction to landmark litigation, Chisom v. Roemer, and Clark vs. Edwards, a companion case brought under the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The Chisom and Clark litigation prompted the creation of majority-minority districts and enabled black voters to have the equal opportunity to elect their preferred candidates of choice to Louisiana’s judiciary. Prior to this litigation, no black person had ever been elected to the Louisiana Supreme Court. In 2013, Chief Justice Bernette Johnson, elected from a majority-black sub-district, became the Louisiana Supreme Court’s first black Chief Justice.
Consistent with this litigation, in 1996, the Louisiana Task Force on Racial and Ethnic Fairness in the Courts issued a report with a foreword by Retired Former Chief Justice Pascal Calogero, who accepted the report on behalf of the Louisiana Supreme Court. The Task Force reached several key conclusions, including that, “the practice of judicial elections by sub-districts, where appropriate, [is] the only feasible means of ensuring diversity and ethnic heterogeneity in our judicial system.” In his foreword, Chief Justice Calogero “urge[d] all judges and court personnel in the state to read the Report and, more importantly, to renew their commitment to racial and ethnic fairness. Although more than 20 years old, the Task Force’s findings and recommendations recognized the importance of diversity in the judiciary and Chief Justice Calogero’s admonition continue to resonate today.

Consistent with the Task Force’s report, the Martinet Society fully supports that, where legally appropriate, majority-minority sub-districts are necessary to remedy institutionalized racism that prevents the genuine integration of the Louisiana judiciary. The Martinet Society also remains firmly of the position that judges elected from majority-minority districts across the state, including the Louisiana Supreme Court, are no less legitimate than judges elected from districts comprised of a majority of white voters. As demonstrated by the decades of hard-fought progress, black jurists, including members of the Martinet Society, have overcome tremendous barriers, like segregation and inequality in educational institutions, to become contributing members of the legal profession.

Today, majority-minority districts have been successful in 1st, 4th, 9th, 14th, 15th, 16th, 18th, 19th, 23rd, 24th, 27th, and 40th JDCs, and have provided avenues of opportunity for black voters to elect judges of their choice to these districts and numerous other trial and appellate courts, including the Louisiana Supreme Court. These majority-minority districts are the result of a long fight against centuries of exclusion and disenfranchisement.

The Martinet Society reaffirms the continuing need, now more than ever, for diversity in Louisiana judiciary’s and, fully supports the adoption of majority-minority sub-districts for electing members to all levels of Louisiana’s judiciary. The Martinet Society remains as committed today, as it has been since its founding 60 years ago to eradicating racial segregation in every aspect of life in Louisiana including Louisiana’s 32nd JDC.

ABOUT THE LOUIS A. MARTINET LEGAL SOCIETY

The objective of the Louis A. Martinet Society is to encourage the interchange of ideas, promote legal scholarship, advance the science of jurisprudence, promote the administration of justice, uphold the order and ethics of the courts and the profession of law, and promote the welfare of the legal profession in Louisiana. The Martinet Society has chapter across Louisiana. The Louis A. Martinet Society was founded in 1957 by—Earl J. Amedee; Israel M. Augustine; Louis Berry; Lionel Collins; Robert F. Collins; Niles R. Douglas; Norman C. Francis; Benjamin J. Johnson; Alvin Jones; Vanue B. LaCour; Ernest N. Morial; Justice Revius Ortique, Jr.; J. T. Powell; James Smith; A. P. Tureaud; Freddie Warren and Lawrence Wheeler. These African-American lawyers, committed themselves, just as Martinet Society members do today, to combatting racial injustices and inequalities in and outside of Louisiana’s courtrooms. The Martinet Society has chapters throughout the state of Louisiana.