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NAACP Legal Defense Fund Statement on Sentencing of Former North Charleston Police Officer Michael Slager

Today, former North Charleston police officer Michael Slager was sentenced to 20 years in prison for violating the civil rights of Walter Scott, an unarmed Black man who Slager fatally shot during a routine traffic stop. [Sherrilyn Ifill](#), President and Director-Counsel of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc., issued the following statement:

“Convictions of law enforcement officers who violate the civil rights of people of color are unforgivably few and far between – even in cases as egregious as this one. Despite a video that showed that Walter Scott was shot in the back as he ran from law enforcement, it took a federal prosecution to hold Officer Slager accountable after his state prosecution ended in a mistrial. Officers rarely receive any prison sentence at all for their crimes, and while Slager is receiving what some may see as a strong sentence, we know that no punishment can repair the hole left in the lives of his loved ones. The fact is that Walter Scott should be alive today.

“Individual accountability, however, is only one aspect of the changes that are needed to prevent killings like that of Walter Scott. The North Charleston Police Department, like other law enforcement agencies around the country, must adopt systemic reforms. We will continue pushing for the Department of Justice’s Community Oriented Policing Services Office to release its assessment of the NCPD, in addition to pursuing substantive reforms by working with local officials and residents. The DOJ has refused to release that assessment despite calls from the community and U.S. Senator and North Charleston native Tim Scott (R-SC) for its release. Officer Slager’s conviction and sentence are only first steps. The process of building a relationship rooted in mutual trust between North Charleston residents and their police department cannot begin in earnest until meaningful changes are put in place to ensure unbiased and accountable policing policies and practices.”

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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.