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Stinging DOJ Report Details Entrenched Racial Bias in Chicago Police Department, Systematic Violation of Residents' Constitutional Rights

Today, the United States Department of Justice (DOJ) issued a stinging report describing a pattern and practice of unconstitutional policing in the Chicago Police Department (CPD). The Department of Justice has been investigating the CPD, one of the nation’s largest police departments, since 2015 in the wake of outcry over the shooting death of teenager Laquan McDonald.

“The problems with CPD go back far longer than 2015 and are not the result of ‘a few bad apples’ on the Chicago police force. City residents have faced an entrenched culture of cover-ups, disregard for accountability, and ongoing police violence and abuse against civilians for decades,” said Sherrilyn Ifill, President and Director-Counsel of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. “While DOJ’s findings are appalling, they are sadly not surprising, especially to the residents of Chicago who are living the cruel reality of systemic racially-biased policing every day.”

Chicago has experienced a wave of violent crime and one of the highest murder rates in years. According to Ifill, the DOJ findings are critical to addressing violent crime in Chicago. “A strong relationship of trust between police and residents is essential to reducing violent crime in our cities,” Ifill stated. “These findings should form the basis of an agreement that will reform illegal policing practices and encourage residents to work together with police to promote public safety in Chicago.”

LDF commends DOJ for its tireless efforts in undertaking and completing its pattern and practice investigation. “This is a vital step in fixing a broken department, but it is only a first step,” noted Ifill. “The Department of Justice made another critical announcement today: an agreement in principle between DOJ and the city to enter into a consent decree. The hard and dedicated work to reach that agreement begins an important next step through open negotiations with the City and an open dialogue with residents of Chicago to forge an agreement that will reform policing practices in the City. The Department has a duty – even during this transition
period -- to work diligently to remedy violations of the Constitution documented in its findings,” Ifill concluded.

LDF appreciates CPD’s willingness to work with DOJ to address the alleged violations as demonstrated by signing the agreement in principle. LDF is undertaking a thorough review of the report and urges the CPD and DOJ to continue to work with residents, city officials, and other stakeholders to develop a reform agenda that serves the long-ignored needs of the community and that can yield meaningful and lasting change in Chicago.

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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. In media attributions, please refer to us as the NAACP Legal Defense Fund or LDF.*