Today, President Trump signed an executive order undoing the Obama Administration’s restrictions on the transfer of certain military equipment to state and local police departments. The NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund’s (LDF) Policing Reform Campaign vehemently opposes this dangerous and irresponsible move, which allows military equipment to flow freely to state and local law enforcement agencies, including transfers to law enforcement working in public schools which LDF’s Policing Reform Campaign has long advocated against. Janai Nelson, Associate Director-Counsel at the LDF issued the following statement:

“Just as we feared, the Administration moved forward with plans to remove limitations on the transfer of certain surplus military gear to state and local police departments. Now tracked armored vehicles, bayonets, grenade-launchers, and camouflage uniforms will once again be placed in the hands of law enforcement officers patrolling our streets without any officer training, data collection or reporting requirements. We’ve seen the devastating impact an overly-militarized police force has on communities of color. Undoing these sensible restrictions endangers public safety and further erodes the relationship between police and the communities they are required to serve by feeding the false notion that the public – especially people of color – are enemy combatants. When law enforcement agencies are given powerful weaponry, they will use it. There’s simply no reason a police department should have the ability to use a weaponized aircraft, for example, on members of its community. And, to the extent military equipment is used at all, which we fully oppose, it must be monitored and minimal. A recent GAO report found that the 1033 Department of Defense program allowed $1.2 million of surplus military equipment to be shipped to investigators pretending to be a police department. Without safeguards in place, the threat of rogue individuals securing military equipment is magnified.

“Alarmingly, this executive order also does away with the Obama Administration’s restrictions specifically banning military grade equipment from being transferred to police officers working in our nation’s public schools. Military equipment has no place in our streets, let alone in our schools. If President Trump were truly concerned with law enforcement and public safety, he would spend less time stoking fear, tension, and resentment, and more time promoting de-escalation and community engagement.

“We urge our leaders on Capitol Hill to immediately enact a bill that would reinstitute sound restrictions or, better still, eliminate the 1033 Program completely. We also call on our government representatives to exercise their oversight authority to ensure that these weapons do not fall into the hands of those policing public schools. Finally, we ask our state and local governments to
categorically reject the use of lethal military equipment by local law enforcement agencies and, especially, to take steps to keep such weaponry out of our schools.”

###

*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.*