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STATEMENT OF LDF PRESIDENT AND DIRECTOR-COUNSEL SHERRILYN IFILL ON REPRESENTATION OF MUMIA ABU-JAMAL

Debo Adebile is an excellent choice to be the next Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights. He is eminently qualified. For years, Debo Adebile has worked tirelessly to defend the American promise of equality for all of its citizens. The NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. issued this statement when his nomination was announced.

It is unfortunate that Debo Adebile and the NAACP Legal Defense & Educational Fund, Inc. have been criticized for LDF's representation of Mr. Mumia Abu-Jamal. Almost 25 years after Mr. Abu-Jamal's trial and conviction in state court, LDF chose to support Mr. Abu-Jamal's federal court jury selection challenges, and later to represent him. We did so for the same reason that we have represented people accused and convicted of crimes since Thurgood Marshall was LDF's first Director-Counsel – because LDF is committed to ensuring that the American criminal justice system is administered fairly and without regard to race, such that all individuals charged with or convicted of crimes are afforded the safeguards guaranteed by the constitution. Given the persistent, arbitrary and uncontroverted role of race in the administration of the death penalty, this mandate is particularly imperative in racially charged capital cases. When racial discrimination or other constitutional defects enter any aspect of the criminal justice system, it imperils the integrity of that system for everyone.

In Mr. Abu-Jamal's case, after LDF became counsel-of-record, his death sentence was conclusively found to be unconstitutional because his sentencing jury had been improperly instructed. Indeed, the federal court of appeals found in 2008, and again in 2011, that LDF's claim of constitutional error was correct. At no time during LDF's representation of Mr. Abu-Jamal did LDF lawyers disparage Officer Daniel Faulkner in any way. Indeed, Officer Faulkner's name is never mentioned in any of the briefs LDF filed on Mr. Abu-Jamal's behalf.

LDF has always supported and respected law enforcement officers for the valuable role that they play in protecting our society. Indeed, over the course of its history, LDF has represented hundreds of police officers (and other first responders) in cases that sought to ensure equal employment opportunities without regard to race, ethnicity or gender.

LDF has also defended countless individuals charged and/or convicted of crimes, regardless of whether they maintain their innocence (like Mr. Abu-Jamal) or are factually guilty of their crimes, in cases where there is evidence of racial bias or discrimination in the process. Thus, LDF now represents Mr. Duane Buck, an African-American man who is on death row in Texas. Although Mr. Buck is guilty of the crime for which he was convicted (and has expressed sincere remorse for his crimes), his death sentence is fundamentally unfair because it was imposed after an "expert" witness testified that Mr. Buck was more likely to be dangerous in the future because he is black. Mr. Buck is, today, on death row, under threat of execution. LDF is therefore fighting for Mr. Buck's life and to ensure that no one faces a death sentence because of their race.

Because Mr. Adebile and LDF's representation of Mr. Abu-Jamal (and other condemned prisoners) is consistent with the highest principles of due process set forth by our Constitution, it is deeply troubling that some have suggested that this vitally important work diminishes Mr. Adebile's outstanding qualification to serve as Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights, and discredits the unparalleled reputation of LDF. Contrary to these assertions, such an unwavering commitment to the Constitution, equality and justice, is an essential quality for any individual, or institution, committed to protecting civil rights.