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LDF Issues Statement on NYC Mayor Eric Adams' "Blueprint to End Gun Violence"

On Monday, New York City Mayor Eric Adams issued his "Blueprint to End Gun Violence," which detailed his administration's approach to addressing gun violence.

In response to his plan, NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF) President and Director-Counsel Sherrilyn Ifill issued the following statement:

"This past week has been a challenging one in New York City, particularly in light of the fatal shootings of two NYPD officers, an 11-month-old baby girl being shot while in a parked car, the continued crisis of unhoused individuals during a brutal winter, and rising concern within certain neighborhoods about crime. New York has faced this kind of challenge before. Too often the response has been to embrace unproven, drastic initiatives with devastating long-term consequences for the lives of vulnerable communities in our city. While we understand and empathize with Mayor Eric Adams' desire to quickly articulate a plan to address gun violence, we are concerned that some aspects of the plan he has announced reflect a return to failed and counterproductive strategies in New York that have proven ineffective and counterproductive in the past.

"Merely expanding the NYPD's footprint in targeted communities, for example, risks repeating the department's history of unconstitutional discriminatory policing practices and surveillance during periods of intense over-policing of Black and Latino communities in the City. It is worth remembering that the NYPD remains under a federal consent decree for discriminatory practices under earlier 'stop and frisk' practices meant, at its inception, to alleviate concerns about rising crime. Without addressing the root causes of violence, such an approach will only lead to the over-policing that New Yorkers who experienced stop-and-frisk know all too well.

"We already know that additional law enforcement patrols in our subways does nothing to address the conditions in the city's shelters that make so many homeless persons reluctant to utilize the shelter system. Without a clear plan to improve the safety, support services, and COVID protections in shelters so that unhoused individuals have a viable and safe alternative to sleeping in the subway, and without a clear commitment to increasing and improving mental health services for those most vulnerable, increased police patrols will not address public safety challenges that reflect the absence of critical social service infrastructure in the city.

"One concerning element of the new plan is the use of facial recognition technology, which Mayor Adams claims can identify individuals and amass information regarding their public activities in just eight seconds. Speed and justice are often at odds. The use of this

technology by law enforcement, which research has shown to be inaccurate for racial and gender minorities, risks infringing the rights of New Yorkers particularly due to the NYPD's history of racially discriminatory policing, and failure to fully comply with the Public Oversight of Surveillance Technology Act.

“The re-emergence as part of this plan of the NYPD's plainclothes anti-crime unit, whose members have historically harassed and killed New Yorkers, such as Amadou Diallo and Eric Garner, is deeply troubling. Despite some changes under Mayor Adams' new plan, such as plain-clothes officers being identifiable through NYPD jackets, having police in unmarked cars has long been associated with abuses and excesses, and members of the community are rightfully concerned about being surveilled and followed by individuals that they do not know are law enforcement officers. Mayor Adams has not articulated how these units will be formed, monitored, and managed in ways that will address their historic problems, the rewarding of their aggressive enforcement, and the NYPD's failure to properly exercise oversight. Repackaging abusive and failed NYPD practices risks subjecting New Yorkers to more violence and will not make communities safer.

“Moreover, rolling back systemic improvements, such as recent bail reforms that have not been proven to increase gun violence, is a concerning initiative. Likewise, treating children accused of crimes as adults is not a proven crime-fighting practice. Instead, it merely reinforces the idea that certain children—more often Black and Brown children who are disproportionately criminalized—are irredeemable. This administration must use an evidence- and data-centered approach to gun violence that does not brand young people with criminality or retread the long-worn and failed path of over-policing.

“The Mayor's proposed efforts to expand mental health resources that will support critically vulnerable populations in this city are laudable, as is the launch of a Summer Youth Program for 2022. As the New York Times editorial board explained, however, summer jobs are not a substitute for a comprehensive roadmap to ensure long-term housing, permanent employment opportunities, and public health infrastructure for the sustained support of vulnerable residents that is needed to address the root causes of violence in the city.

“LDF looks forward to being in dialogue with Mayor Adams and his team to support their efforts to find holistic solutions to New York's public safety issues. And we encourage the Mayor to collaborate with individuals and organizations that are deeply immersed in addressing these issues, particularly those from communities that will be targeted by initiatives outlined in the Mayor's plan. We cannot return to the use of long discredited practices to address the public safety concerns of New York's present.”

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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. LDF 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.

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