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LDF Issues Statement on the Federal Hate Crimes Convictions in the Murder of Ahmaud Arbery

Today, Travis McMichael, Gregory McMichael, and William “Roddie” Bryan were found guilty in a federal hate crime trial of attempted kidnapping and willfully, by way of force and threat of force, injuring, intimidating, and interfering with Ahmaud Arbery’s rights because of Mr. Arbery’s race and color. The McMichaels were also found guilty of using a firearm during a crime of violence.

In response, NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF) Associate Director-Counsel Janai S. Nelson issued the following statement:

“While the state trial of Travis McMichael, Gregory McMichael, and William Bryan found them guilty of murder, it made no finding regarding the racial animus motivating their actions. Nonetheless, as the federal hate crimes convictions have shown, it was clear that the specter of racism undergirded the sequence of events that led to Ahmaud Arbery’s death.

“Historically, the U.S. Department of Justice has often declined to prosecute hate crimes, and so the significance of this federal trial and subsequent convictions cannot be overstated. That the hate crime trial for Bryan and the McMichaels unearthed a litany of vile, racist remarks and deep racial animus directed at Black people is no surprise, but it brought into sharp focus the breadth and depth of the race-based hatred held by all three men involved in Mr. Arbery’s murder in a way that was previously unseen.

“Where once we had strong reason to believe that these men trapped and killed Mr. Arbery with racist motivations, we now have undeniable evidence entered into the court record – from text messages to social media posts to witness testimony – that exposes their callous dehumanization of Black people. This case demonstrates the ways in which the legal system can serve as a vehicle for truth and accountability.

“These convictions were only possible because of the tireless efforts of the Arbery family, who fought to ensure that the three men who murdered Mr. Arbery would fully account for the role racism played in their actions. Our hearts go out to the Arbery family, and we hope this conviction provides them with a measure of closure.”

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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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