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NAACP Legal Defense Fund to Deliver Opening Statements in Trial to Determine Future of Race-Conscious Admissions at Harvard

BOSTON – The NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. ([LDF](#)) will make opening statements today in a federal trial regarding a lawsuit that seeks to eliminate race from consideration in Harvard College admissions, threatening diversity at the school.

Students for Fair Admissions (SFFA), an organization headed by well-known civil rights adversary Edward Blum, filed the lawsuit in 2014. In response, a group of 25 Harvard student and alumni organizations — representing diverse backgrounds and racial and ethnic heritages — filed amicus briefs this past [July](#) and [August](#) that condemn the lawsuit’s attempt to pit historically marginalized groups against each other. The organizations are represented by LDF, and four LDF clients—a mix of current and former Harvard students representing the 25 groups—will testify in the trial later this month.

“Harvard’s ability to provide students with the educational benefits of racial and ethnic diversity is under attack with this lawsuit, which attempts to roll back important efforts to expand educational opportunities to historically marginalized groups,” said [Jin Hee Lee](#), **LDF Senior Deputy Director of Litigation**. “As recently as 2016, the Supreme Court has reaffirmed that universities have the right to consider race as one component of a comprehensive admissions process. The elimination of race from a holistic admissions process would be a grave disservice to all students at Harvard, and it would set a dangerous precedent for higher education more broadly. LDF stands with the students and alumni of Harvard who are using their voices to defend diversity against attacks from SFFA and to create a more equitable future for all.”

In its amicus briefs, LDF argues that blocking Harvard from considering race as one of many factors in a multifaceted application process would deepen racial inequity in higher education. The briefs explain that an inclusive admissions policy is an essential mechanism for cultivating diversity on college campuses and addressing entrenched racial barriers to educational opportunity, and that removing race from the admissions process will force students to hide a key part of their identity.

Association of Black Harvard Women, Coalition for a Diverse Harvard, Harvard Asian American Women's Association, Harvard Black Students Association, Harvard Islamic Society, Harvard Minority Association of Pre-Medical Students, Harvard University Muslim Alumni, Harvard-Radcliffe Chinese Students Association, Kuumba Singers of Harvard College, Native American Alumni of Harvard University, Phillips Brooks House Association, Task Force on Asian and Pacific American Studies at Harvard College, and Robert Rhew, member of the Harvard Asian American Alumni Alliance issued the following statement:

“We come from different backgrounds and lived experiences, but we all agree that race must be considered as part of Harvard’s admissions policy. Diversity on campus – and at all levels of education – matters. It matters for our schools, for our communities, and for our country, which needs leaders who have experienced people of different backgrounds and perspectives. This lawsuit is an attack on the very idea of what education should be. The court must uphold the ability of colleges and universities to foster a diverse campus.”

LDF is a leading voice in the decades-long struggle for equitable college admissions policies, from its early efforts to desegregate colleges and universities throughout the Jim Crow South to its recent advocacy on behalf of Black students as amicus curiae in [*Fisher v. University of Texas*](#). In *Fisher*, the United States Supreme Court ruled against Edward Blum and Abigail Fisher, reaffirming the Court’s longstanding position that, given the critical importance of diversity in higher education, universities may consider race as one of many factors in admissions decisions.

Read the LDF brief and declarations from Harvard student and alumni organizations [here](#).

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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. 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.