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LDF Issues Statement on Biden Administration's Pardons, Commutations, and Investments in Re-entry After Incarceration

Today, in a promising exercise of the President's clemency authority, the Biden administration issued a number of pardons and commutations, and announced a series of investments to support post-incarceration re-entry programs and other means of community support.

Among these investments are an expansion of federal employment opportunities to include education, training, and mentorship; improved access to federal employment grant programs to formerly incarcerated persons and historically marginalized communities; and a host of other resources intended to aid in successful re-entry following incarceration.

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

"We commend the Biden administration for taking these important first steps to address the glaring deficiencies of our criminal legal system while also providing important resources for formerly incarcerated persons. President Biden's exercise of clemency authority is crucial to mitigating the harms of mass incarceration and systemic neglect.

"We hope that today is the first of many such acts to ensure our criminal legal system is fair, restorative, and responsive to the needs of both incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals. And, while these pardons, commutations, and investments are a step forward, there is still much work to be done.

"Any vision of successful re-entry, for example, must necessarily include full-rights restoration for those who have been formerly incarcerated. Moreover, while it is both unusual and commendable for President Biden to issue these commutations and pardons during the middle of his Administration, thousands of individuals — some convicted of nonviolent offenses and others convicted of more serious crimes — remain in federal prisons despite compelling reasons for release. And, given the exceedingly cruel and irreversible use of the death penalty by the federal government, any existing death penalty sentences should be reduced or commuted. Meanwhile, a moratorium on federal executions —

alongside the issuance of executive guidelines to establish prosecutorial prohibitions for seeking the death penalty — is still overdue.

“LDF will continue to urge the administration to help this country move beyond a criminal legal system rife with cruelty and discrimination and to embrace instead a humane system of public safety that is defined by a steadfast commitment to rehabilitation.”

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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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