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**LDF Issues Statement on DOJ Pattern or Practice Investigation
of NYPD's Special Victims Division**

Yesterday, Assistant Attorney General Kristen Clarke [announced](#) that the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) will initiate an investigation of the New York City Police Department's (NYPD) Special Victims Division to determine whether it engages in a pattern or practice of gender-biased policing, in violation of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994, the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, and the Safe Streets Act of 1968.

The NYPD's Special Victims Division has a long history of systemic failures, including the failure to respect the dignity and to center the needs of sexual assault victims and conduct that impedes effective sexual assault investigations. In 2018, New York City's Office of the Inspector General [released](#) its report on the investigation of the NYPD's Special Victims Division, outlining that the Division was routinely understaffed and unprepared to fulfill its obligation to investigate sexual assault cases. Victim advocates and service providers noted numerous instances where NYPD personnel would respond "insensitively, dismissively, or incredulously" during victim interviews.

In response to the DOJ's announcement, [Legal Defense Fund](#) (LDF) **Director of Strategic Initiatives Jin Hee Lee** issued the following statement:

"We commend the critically needed initiation of the first pattern or practice investigation of the NYPD. The Special Victims Division has long been associated with failing victims of sexual assault through a host of troubling structural failures, misconduct allegations, and the mistreatment of victims. While this investigation is a promising development, it does not resolve the myriad problems with the NYPD's practices that continue to harm and dehumanize people of color throughout New York City."

Puneet Cheema, Manager of the Justice in Public Safety Project at LDF, added:

"Women of color throughout New York City — and Black women in particular — experience sexual assault at disproportionate rates. In fact, between January 2021 and May 2022, while Black women made up 15% of New York City's population, available data shows that Black women experienced approximately 39% of sexual assaults in the City. The chronic, highly publicized failures of the NYPD, and the NYPD's Special Victims Division in particular, are a glaring example of how law enforcement do not create safety, especially in our most vulnerable communities. Thus, in order to be effective, this investigation must assess whether officers' responses to victims vary by the victim's race and whether transgender people experience biased policing due to their gender identity. We appreciate the Department for taking steps to ensure the NYPD is held accountable."

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Founded in 1940, the Legal Defense Fund (LDF) is the nation's first civil rights law organization. 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 Legal Defense Fund or LDF. Please note that 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.