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LDF Announces New Strategic Initiatives Department; Two New Positions

The [Legal Defense Fund](#) (LDF) today announced the creation of the Strategic Initiatives Department, which will house specific projects and campaigns that integrate LDF's multi-faceted advocacy tools – including litigation, policy, organizing, communications, research, and public education – to maximize the impact of affirmative, strategic, and community-centered advocacy that secures the full citizenship and equality of Black Americans.

[Jin Hee Lee](#), who previously served as the Senior Deputy Director of Litigation and Director of Strategic Initiatives, will be the inaugural director of this stand-alone department and serve as part of LDF's senior leadership team. Additionally, in June, [Lisa Cylar Barrett](#), who has served as LDF's Director of Policy for over three years, overseeing LDF's expansive federal and state policy portfolio, expanded her senior leadership role to also become the Director of the D.C. Office.

"I am so pleased to announce the establishment of LDF's Strategic Initiatives Department and the new roles for both Jin Hee Lee and Lisa Cylar Barrett – two highly accomplished and critically important members of LDF's senior leadership team," said LDF President and Director-Counsel Janai Nelson. "The new Strategic Initiatives Department will deepen LDF's ability to build upon our legacy as an innovative legal organization and enable us to be even more effective for the communities we serve, especially during this precarious time for our multi-racial democracy.

"As a veteran litigator of over 22 years, including 14 years at LDF, Jin will bring her litigation and management expertise and vision for integrated legal advocacy, operational solutions, and strategic problem-solving to bear on the broad and innovative portfolio of the Strategic Initiatives Department."

The Strategic Initiatives Department will broaden LDF's capacity to utilize its diverse expertise and tools on the following key initiatives in partnership with local, impacted communities:

- **Justice in Public Safety Project (JPP):** Launched in the aftermath of Michael Brown's murder and the mass uprisings in Ferguson, Missouri, as well as the killings of Eric Garner, Freddie Gray, Walter Scott, Sandra Bland, and Terrence Crutcher among others, JPP aims to replace the current system of law enforcement with a reimagined vision of public safety that centers the dignity and protection of Black people who have suffered disproportionate harm at the hands of police. LDF has long litigated against racially discriminatory police practices as part of its expansive criminal justice practice, including a prominent case representing Black and Latinx public housing residents in the court-ordered monitoring of the New York City Police Department in *Davis v. City of*

New York. JPP integrates LDF’s litigation, policy, organizing, research, and communications resources to address entrenched racial biases within law enforcement and to reimagine public safety that protects and invests in Black communities and breaks the pernicious and false stereotypes associating Blackness with violence and criminality.

- **Pro Truth Initiative:** In September 2020, President Trump issued Executive Order 13950, which sought to censor important speech regarding race, equity, and diversity by federal contractors and grantees. In response to this alarming attack on the truth of our nation’s history, the lived experiences of Black and other marginalized populations, and efforts to address persistent race and gender inequalities, LDF filed a putative class-action lawsuit. The Pro Truth Initiative (Pro Truth) builds upon this early work, as well as LDF’s legacy in *Brown v. Board of Education*, to protect the truth of our history of racial subjugation and its ongoing impact on present-day, systemic inequalities. In addition, Pro Truth advances racial equity, inclusion, and diversity in PK-12 and higher education—so that future generations have the knowledge and tools to build a better future for people of all races. Pro Truth also includes efforts to preserve race conscious admissions in higher education and race-neutral efforts to promote racial diversity and equal opportunities in PK-12 education.
- **Voting Rights Defender/Prepared to Vote Project (VRD/PTV):** LDF has monitored elections to ensure that Black voters do not face barriers to voting at the polls for over 20 years. As a founding member of the 1-866-OUR-VOTE initiative and later through its PTV program, LDF has played a central role in election protection efforts. For the 2020 elections, which were plagued by unprecedented election disinformation and threats to our democratic electoral process, the Thurgood Marshall Institute expanded PTV to include the VRD project to provide election information to the voting public and proactively fight against voter suppression. The VRD/PTV project will now be housed in LDF’s Strategic Initiatives Department as a permanent project.
- **Redressing Housing Segregation Initiative:** This new economic justice initiative will target local housing policy on land use, zoning, siting, subsidy for affordable housing, and/or land forfeiture (such as tax and water liens and heir’s property policies) in specific local jurisdictions. It will utilize LDF’s expertise in research, public education, organizing, policy advocacy, and potentially litigation to develop an interdisciplinary approach to reducing residential segregation and the Black-white wealth gap through local housing policy.

“I am equally pleased that Lisa Cylar Barrett has expanded her senior leadership portfolio to help lead the strategic direction and culture of LDF’s Washington D.C. office,” said Nelson. “Lisa has over 25 years of experience working in the legal, philanthropic, and nonprofit sectors to eliminate disparities and achieve racial justice. Her leadership of our policy efforts and extensive and long-standing connections across our nation’s capitol are instrumental to LDF’s success at the federal and state levels.”

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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.