

April 30, 2025

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*****FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE*****

Civil Rights and Legal Organizations File Lawsuit on Behalf of Black and Latino New Yorkers to Challenge NYPD's Discriminatory Gang Database

(NEW YORK, NY) – Today, the [Legal Defense Fund](#) (LDF), The [Legal Aid Society](#), The [Bronx Defenders](#), [LatinoJustice PRLDEF](#), and the law firm [Ballard Spahr](#) filed a putative class-action complaint against the City of New York, challenging the New York City Police Department's (NYPD) racially disparate targeting, surveillance, and criminalization of tens of thousands of Black and Latino New Yorkers through the use of the Criminal Group Database, widely known as the Gang Database. The complaint asserts that the NYPD's practices and policies related to the Database are in violation of the First, Fourth, and Fourteenth Amendments to the United States Constitution, as well as state and local laws.

The complaint outlines how the NYPD's practices and policies related to the database almost exclusively target Black and Latino people, who comprise 99% of the database. Because of their entry in the database, these Black and Latino New Yorkers are surveilled, harassed, and targeted by police in ways that non-Black and non-Latino people do not experience even when engaging in similar conduct.

For years, the NYPD has racially profiled and harassed countless Black and Latino New Yorkers, some of them children, for everyday behavior, such as hanging out with their friends, walking home, liking a social media post, or simply living in public housing. People on the database are frequently stopped and arrested for low-level offenses, such as jaywalking, only to be detained and interrogated—sometimes for several hours—about activities and other individuals wholly unrelated to the underlying reason for their arrest.

“The NYPD has used its Gang Database to systematically target, surveil, and criminalize Black and Latino New Yorkers in violation of their constitutional rights,” **said Kevin E. Jason, Deputy Director of Strategic Initiatives at the Legal Defense Fund.** “We believe in a New York where everyone, including Black and Latino residents, is able to leave their homes, visit their friends, and engage in everyday activities without fear of police harassment and abuse. The only way to make that vision a reality is to end the Gang Database.”

“The NYPD's Gang Database is a surveillance tool that targets, overpolices, and criminalizes our Black and Latino communities,” **said Lourdes M. Rosado, President and General Counsel, LatinoJustice PRLDEF.** “The database is built on bias and fuels wrongful arrests, causing lifelong harm without due process for those in it. People get added for simply wearing a certain

color or for growing up in NYCHA property. This lawsuit is about putting an end to this racist database and ensure accountability and transparency from the NYPD.”

“The NYPD’s Gang Database is a tool of racist policing — plain and simple,” said **Rigodis Appling, Staff Attorney in the Special Litigation Unit & Community Justice Unit at The Legal Aid Society**. “It has terrorized the Black and Latino communities we serve, branding our clients as criminals without evidence and without any regard for the truth. This database has robbed people of their freedom, their safety, and their futures. We are proud to stand in this fight to dismantle a system that has inflicted so much harm, and demand justice for the thousands who have been unjustly targeted.”

“The NYPD’s Gang Database is a dressed-up tool for racially profiling Black and Latino New Yorkers, particularly youth,” said **Anne Venhuizen, Supervising Attorney in the Impact Litigation Practice at The Bronx Defenders**. “Like stop-and-frisk before it, this wasteful tactic continues the NYPD’s legacy of unfairly criminalizing marginalized people without keeping our communities safe. Today’s lawsuit is an important step toward holding the NYPD accountable for once again unconstitutionally targeting Black and Latino young people. It envisions a City where everyone - regardless of race - has the right to live freely, without the threat of discrimination, surveillance, or police overreach.”

"The complaint we filed today with our respected co-counsel at the Legal Defense Fund, LatinoJustice PRLDEF, The Legal Aid Society, and The Bronx Defenders, sets forth in no uncertain terms that the NYPD’s practices constitute blatant and ongoing violations of the constitutional rights of Black and Latino New Yorkers,” said **Margie Peerce, Litigation Partner and Managing Partner at Ballard Spahr’s New York Office**.

The police scrutiny, harassment, and enforcement actions endured by the people on the Gang Database has drastically and negatively impacted their lives. The people placed on the NYPD’s database have been forced to limit their socializing with friends and families; avoid leaving their homes; stay away public spaces; refrain from taking their children to local playgrounds; and make other changes in their everyday lives due to fear of elevated police targeting and harassment.

For years, the database has operated without transparency and accountability at the expense of the safety and security of Black and Latino New Yorkers. At the same time, there is no evidence that the Database improves public safety or reduces crime.

Read the lawsuit [here](#).

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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 multidisciplinary 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.

The Legal Aid Society exists for one simple yet powerful reason: to ensure that New Yorkers are not denied their right to equal justice because of poverty. For nearly 150 years, we have protected, defended, and advocated for those who have struggled in silence for far too long. Every day, in every borough, The Legal Aid Society changes the lives of our clients and helps improve our communities. <https://www.legalaidnyc.org>

The Bronx Defenders is a public defender nonprofit that has developed a groundbreaking model of holistic representation, providing systems-impacted individuals with teams of lawyers, social workers, and advocates dedicated to addressing their unique circumstances, thereby transforming how low-income people in the Bronx are represented in the legal system.