



**For Immediate Release**  
**Wednesday, June 21, 2023**

**LDF Media**  
212-965-2200 / [media@naacpldf.org](mailto:media@naacpldf.org)

**LDF Lawyer Natasha Merle Confirmed to the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of New York**

Today, the United States Senate voted to confirm Natasha Merle to the United States District Court for the Eastern District of New York. Ms. Merle has served at LDF since 2016, as Assistant Counsel, Senior Counsel, and most recently as Deputy Director of Litigation, and is the first attorney since LDF's founder Thurgood Marshall, who became the first Black Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States, to be confirmed directly from the organization to the federal bench. Justice Marshall was elevated in 1961 to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit. Ms. Merle is the 100<sup>th</sup> district court judge confirmed by the United States Senate under the Biden-Harris Administration.

In response to Ms. Merle's confirmation, Legal Defense Fund (LDF) President and Director-Counsel Janai S. Nelson issued the following statement:

"We enthusiastically congratulate Natasha Merle, our LDF colleague, on her well-deserved and historic confirmation as a U.S. District Court Judge for the Eastern District of New York. Throughout her exemplary career, Ms. Merle has proven to be a brilliant legal professional who is committed to the protection of civil rights, the rule of law, and democracy. We are thrilled that she will now bring these laudable qualities and her prodigious skills to the bench as a federal judge.

"The Senate's confirmation of Ms. Merle is a recognition of the undeniable strengths she brings to our federal court system. She will be the first former public defender to serve on the bench for the Eastern District in nearly 30 years — and is only the second judge in the history of the Eastern District to have been a public defender. She is also the 100<sup>th</sup> district court judge to be confirmed in the Biden-Harris Administration and reflects the Administration's continued commitment to adding both diversity of experience and background to our nation's courts. Ms. Merle brings that and more, having litigated before state and federal courts at every level, including before the U.S. Supreme Court. She has also provided legal defense to indigent clients facing capital punishment. In her roles as Assistant Counsel, Senior Counsel, and Deputy Director of Litigation at LDF, Ms. Merle has served as counsel on a wide range of significant cases to protect civil rights, including the right to vote. She now follows a path set by luminaries like Thurgood Marshall and Constance Baker Motley, both legendary LDF alumni who became trail-blazing federal judges.

"We applaud the addition of Ms. Merle's deep legal experience, high ethical standards, and collegiality — which we will miss greatly at LDF — to the district court of the Eastern District of New York."

###

*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.*