



For Immediate Release

Tuesday, March 5, 2024

LDF Media

media@naacpldf.org

Thurgood Marshall Institute Releases Black History Month Brief Examining State Control of Black Political Power in Local Communities

Last week, the Legal Defense Fund's (LDF) Thurgood Marshall Institute released a new research brief, [*When the State Takes Over: How State Officials Usurping Local Control Threatens Local Black Political Power*](#), authored by Senior Researcher Dr. Sandhya Kajeepeta. The brief, released during Black History Month, outlines the history and growth of local Black political power and the emergence of state takeovers as a strategy for state officials to usurp that power.

The brief provides an important perspective on how Black communities are targeted throughout the country by state takeovers without appropriate justification across multiple domains, including education, economic justice, the criminal legal system, and voting. The growing trend of state takeovers of Black-led cities, occurring when state governments intervene and take control of local affairs, the brief notes, undermines the autonomy of Black communities and represents an anti-democratic shift. Moreover, this shift is rooted in and further perpetuates a dangerous narrative that majority-Black localities are unfit to govern their own communities.

"The Thurgood Marshall Institute's Black History Month brief this year is incredibly critical in underscoring the ways in which majority-Black localities are increasingly vulnerable to state interventions that do not serve their autonomy or sustenance," said Karla McKanders, Director of the Thurgood Marshall Institute. "Dr. Kajeepeta's research is vital at a critical time in which local Black communities are subjected to surveillance and control by states with detrimental results."

The brief identifies several key findings about state takeovers of Black localities across the country and their subsequent impacts on these communities. The available evidence on state takeovers of school districts demonstrates that majority-Black districts are at a higher risk of being taken over regardless of academic performance, and these takeovers have led to harm for students, including the exacerbation of the school-to-prison pipeline. State takeovers of school districts are more likely to remove locally elected school boards and reduce Black representation on school boards. Research also shows that majority-Black cities that have been targeted for emergency manager takeovers in response to financial distress do not fare better following a takeover. Further, state takeovers in election administration have been evidenced to undermine the political power of locally elected officials and thereby undermine the political will of residents, posing a growing threat to local political power and election integrity.

"Through this brief, I aimed to take a comprehensive look at the historical and current use of state takeovers in majority-Black localities as an anti-democratic strategy that undermines the will of Black voters," said Dr. Sandhya Kajeepeta, Senior Researcher of the Thurgood Marshall Institute. "As the brief notes, state takeovers of local government operations are a long-established practice in the education and economic domains and constitute a growing trend in the criminal legal and voting domains. It is my hope that this brief can illuminate how these seemingly isolated takeovers fit within a larger history of state takeovers that usurp Black political power and promote a false narrative that majority-Black cities are unfit to govern their own communities."

###

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.