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LDF Names Deuel Ross and Christopher Kemmitt Directors of Expanded Litigation Department

Today, the Legal Defense Fund (LDF) tapped two leading civil rights attorneys to direct the organization's robust and expanding litigation practice as threats to the civil and human rights of Black people and other marginalized groups continue to rise.

Deuel Ross and Christopher Kemmitt, who have been members of LDF's litigation team for over a decade, will collectively lead the nation's first and foremost racial justice litigation practice initiated 85 years ago by Thurgood Marshall. The two will replace Samuel Spital, who was named Associate Director-Counsel alongside Todd A. Cox in January.

"Deuel Ross and Chris Kemmitt possess the skill, expertise, talent, and intrepid resolve necessary to advance LDF's legendary litigation practice in a tumultuous political landscape and environment of severe civil rights retrenchment," said Janai Nelson, LDF President and Director-Counsel. "Their joint leadership will ensure LDF remains well positioned to continue to use the power of the law to confront the myriad and metastasizing threats to Black communities and U.S. democracy."

"I could not be more excited that Deuel and Chris will lead LDF's extraordinary litigation team as we face some of the most urgent civil rights challenges of our lifetime," said Samuel Spital, LDF Associate Director-Counsel. "The combination of their legal prowess and client-centered approach to advocacy will allow us to be nimble and creative as we seek to uphold the rule of law and protect the communities we've been called to serve."

As Directors of Litigation, Ross and Kemmitt will supervise LDF's extensive litigation docket, which includes cases related to economic justice, educational equity, political participation, and the criminal legal system. Their promotions come at a time of immense legal action by LDF, which has already filed several lawsuits against the Trump administration and delivered oral arguments before the U.S. Supreme Court for the third consecutive term this spring.

Ross was named Deputy Director of Litigation in 2023 and has considerable experience litigating cases related to educational equity and political participation. Among many other path-breaking civil rights cases, Deuel successfully argued *Allen v. Milligan* before the Supreme Court, in which the Court upheld the constitutionality of Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act and ordered Alabama to draw two congressional districts where Black voters could elect the candidates of their choice.

“For 85 years, the Legal Defense Fund has fought for the constitutional promise of equal protection for all and defended the rule of law for Black people and other vulnerable groups,” said Deuel Ross, LDF Director of Litigation. “It is my immense honor to co-lead LDF’s litigation group at this critical time, when efforts to erode our basic democratic principles are threatening to roll back decades of hard-fought progress.”

Kemmitt, who has a background as a federal public defender, has served as Deputy Director of Litigation since 2021. In that role, he spearheaded LDF’s qualified immunity team, arguing major cases before multiple federal appellate courts, including the en banc Eleventh Circuit Court of Appeals, and led efforts to obtain death sentence reversals for several criminal defendants. He has also co-authored amicus briefs in several significant cases, including *Trump v. Hawaii*, which challenged the constitutionality of the “Muslim Ban” enacted by the first Trump administration before the Supreme Court, and *Flowers v. Mississippi*, which resulted in the reversal of a capital conviction due to the systematic exclusion of Black jurors.

“The Legal Defense Fund uses the power of the law to achieve racial justice, inclusivity, and equality,” said Christopher Kemmitt, LDF Director of Litigation. “I am beyond honored to co-lead LDF’s litigation practice at a moment when some of our most fundamental rights are under the most intense attack that we’ve seen in a generation.”

Under the leadership of President and Director-Counsel Nelson and Associate Directors-Counsel Spital and Cox, Kemmitt and Ross will play critical roles in upholding LDF’s legacy of using the law to ensure power is shared, dignity is sacred, and thriving is the standard for all in America.

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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.