



For Immediate Release
Tuesday, July 14, 2020

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LDF Statement on the Resumption of Federal Executions

Today, Sam Spital, Director of Litigation at the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF), issued the following statement regarding the resumption of federal executions:

“This morning, the U.S. government carried out the first federal execution in 17 years after the Supreme Court’s 5-4 decision to lift a stay in the middle of the night resulted in Daniel Lewis Lee being put to death, despite the fervent objections of victims’ family members. Mr. Lee was strapped to a gurney for four hours while waiting to learn his fate, and the government then proceeded with his execution without notice to his attorneys, even as other court filings were still pending.

“As Justice Sotomayor recognized in her dissent, the court’s decision sets a ‘dangerous precedent.’ The majority ‘truncate[d] ordinary procedures of judicial review,’ thereby allowing Mr. Lee and other ‘death-sentenced inmates to be executed before any court can properly consider whether their executions are unconstitutionally cruel and unusual,’ because of the risk that the government’s lethal injection protocol may result in excruciating pain.

“LDF has long opposed the death penalty in all cases. It is an unconstitutionally arbitrary punishment that should have been abolished decades ago. And, like the criminal justice system generally, capital punishment is profoundly tainted by racism against African Americans and other people of color. Today’s execution of Mr. Lee, a white man, paves the way for future federal executions of predominately Black and Latinx individuals, who comprise the majority of individuals on federal death row due to this widespread discrimination.

“While this is an immense setback, LDF remains steadfast in its commitment to advancing racial justice and respect for the rule of law in the criminal justice system, including through its categorical opposition to the death penalty.”

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Founded in 1940, the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF) is the nation’s first civil and human rights law organization. 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. 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 NAACP Legal Defense Fund or LDF.

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