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LDF President and Director-Counsel Sherrilyn Ifill Calls on Congress to Strengthen Justice in Policing Act and Immediately Review Federal Funding to Police Departments

Today, Sherrilyn Ifill, President and Director-Counsel of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF), testified at the House Judiciary Committee's Oversight Hearing on Policing Practices and Law Enforcement Accountability. Ms. Ifill made recommendations for strengthening provisions of the recently-introduced Justice in Policing Act of 2020 ("the Act"), and urged Congress to use its oversight authority to ensure that federal agencies that provide funding to police departments comply with civil rights laws.

"I want to focus this Committee's attention on the significance of this moment, and the importance of the federal government's role in addressing this crisis. You are in a civil rights moment," Ms. Ifill remarked during her oral testimony. "That snapshot of former Officer Derrick Chauvin kneeling on the neck of George Floyd with his hands in his pockets – looking out with no fear of being videotaped – should shame every member of Congress, every judge, every lawyer, everyone who has participated in the perpetuation of a system that calls itself a justice system, but routinely allows officers of the state to take innocent life with impunity. You have the chance to change that."

In written her testimony, Ms. Ifill recommended three measures for further improving the Act. She emphasized that the provision of the bill that abolishes qualified immunity, a defense that has been repeatedly used to shield police officers from consequences for engaging in unconstitutional acts of violence, must be retroactive. This means it must apply to all pending civil suits or those filed after the Act's passage, even if the facts of these filings preceded the Act's creation.

Second, Ms. Ifill encouraged Committee members to expand the categories of complaints in the Act's proposed public national police misconduct registry "to include other acts of misconduct, such as discourtesy and bias, particularly racial bias ... [which] would allow members of the public and law enforcement executives to identify officers with problematic backgrounds."

And, third, Ms. Ifill strongly encouraged Committee members to utilize the Act to ban the transfer of military equipment to police departments, as opposed to merely placing limitations on these transfers.

"Without question, the images of the military-style response by local police to public demonstrations in the aftermath of George Floyd's death are jarring. Converting the streets of this nation into war zones only escalate already tense community-police relations.

Congress has and must act to rid our nation's streets of military equipment ... by banning the transfer of all excess military vehicles and weapons.”

Finally, in addition to recommending improvements to the Act, Ms. Ifill urged Congress to use its oversight authority to ensure that federal agencies that provide financial support to police departments, including the Department of Justice (DOJ), enforce civil rights laws. This includes Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which bars recipients of federal funds from engaging in discrimination based on race, color, and national origin.

“There must be an immediate review of all DOJ and other federal agency grant funding to police departments to ensure compliance with Title VI. Federal funds should be withheld from departments that hire officers previously fired for misconduct or those with suspicious levels of in-custody deaths or assaults. The House and Senate Judiciary Committees have oversight power over the DOJ — and must hold it accountable.”

Read Ms. Ifill's written testimony [here](#).

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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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