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Fifth Circuit Reaffirms Black Representation on State's Highest Court

Today, the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals issued a ruling that solidifies the rights of Black voters to have an equal opportunity to elect candidates of their choice to the Louisiana Supreme Court. The ruling ensures that a longstanding Louisiana Supreme Court seat, which was created as a result of a 1992 consent decree and amended in 2000, will remain in the hands of Black voters.

The Legal Defense Fund (LDF), the law firm Cozen O'Connor, and Louisiana civil rights attorneys Ronald Wilson and William Quigley filed a brief on behalf of Ronald Chisom, Marie Bookman, and the Urban League of Louisiana in response to Attorney General Jeff Landry's unsuccessful attempt in dissolving the decree with little explanation. The LDF supports this ruling and recognizes the importance of the decree which serves as a remedy against the extreme and historic dilution of Black voting power in Louisiana.

In May 2022, the Eastern District Court denied Attorney General Landry's motion to dissolve the decree. The defendants appealed the lower court's decision to the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals without avail. This ruling considers filed briefs from Governor John Bel Edwards and Chief Justice Bernette Joshua Johnson who served on the Louisiana Supreme Court from 1994 to 2020.

"African American voters in New Orleans have been fighting for fair representation on the Louisiana Supreme Court for over 30 years," said **Billy Quigley, civil rights attorney in Louisiana** who was on the team that originally brought this case. "This latest chapter shows how important the protection of voting rights is to all our community."

"Today, the court recognized the failure of Louisiana's Attorney General to show that the important safeguard for ensuring Black Louisiana voters have a say in who presides over their Supreme Court are no longer necessary," said **Leah Aden, LDF Senior Counsel**. ". With so much at stake, and with states like Louisiana continuing to pass hostile legislation surrounding reproductive rights, LGBTQ+ rights, education, and more, it is crucial that Louisiana adhere to court orders that require them to ensure that Black voters' have representation on the state's highest court."

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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.