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LDF Issues Statement on Reinstatement of Reps. Justin Jones and Pearson to Tennessee State House

Last week, the Tennessee House voted on a resolution to expel three members of the House – Representatives Justin Jones, Justin Pearson, and Gloria Johnson – for their involvement in a demonstration for gun control policies following the killings of three children and three adults in a mass shooting at a school in Nashville, Tennessee. Reps. Justin Pearson and Justin Jones, two young Black men, were expelled from the House while Rep. Johnson – a white woman who also participated in the demonstrations – was spared expulsion. Four days later, on April 10, Rep. Jones was unanimously reinstated to his seat in a vote by the Nashville Metropolitan Council. On Wednesday, Rep. Pearson was reinstated by the Shelby County Board of Commissioners in another unanimous vote.

In response, LDF President & Director-Counsel Janai S. Nelson issued the following statement:

“The outpouring of outrage and activism from across the nation – and more importantly the community-led uprising of enthusiasm, advocacy, and outrage against the shameful expulsions of two young Black men from their duly-elected seats in the Tennessee legislature – emphasizes that a supermajority of Americans holds a voracious desire to defend their democracy. Hundreds of people in the representatives’ majority Black and Brown districts in Memphis and Nashville rallied in support of the rightful reinstatement of Reps. Justin Jones and Justin Pearson, making it clear they will not allow lawmakers to undemocratically usurp their will and remove their chosen representatives. We applaud this outcome.

“But we also know that the anti-democratic forces that drove the upheaval in the Tennessee House are also operating all over the country, in creeping legislative efforts to overrule the decisions of Black communities and their elected representatives in Washington D.C., Baltimore, St. Louis, and Mississippi. This trend marks an existential threat to our democracy, one we can only win against if we are as unrelenting in defending democracy and the principles of equality, equity, and freedom as counter-majoritarian extremists are in their willingness to destroy the republic. We would do well to follow the example of the Tennessee Three, who stood up for a multi-racial, multi-ethnic, representative democracy in Tennessee and won.”

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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.