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LDF Responds to Attorney General William Barr's Disturbing Statements on Policing

Yesterday, Attorney General William Barr made highly disturbing remarks during his speech at an awards ceremony honoring law enforcement officers for distinguished service. In his address, Mr. Barr stated that communities that do not show more respect and support to law enforcement officers “might find themselves without the police protection they need.” His remarks reaffirm this administration’s ongoing disregard of the violence and discrimination that communities of color experience at the hands of police – and this divisive rhetoric only serves to further erode the relationship between law enforcement and communities of color.

“It is unacceptable that the United States’ chief law enforcement officer is advocating that police officers withhold services to communities that they perceive as not supporting or respecting them. This is a reckless and dangerous standard for policing anywhere and a particular threat to communities of color, given the prevalence of unlawful policing directed toward people of color,” said Sherrilyn Ifill, President and Director-Counsel of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF). “As we warned in our [opposition letter](#) to Attorney General Barr’s nomination, ‘his rhetoric regarding policing demonstrates a complete lack of understanding, or a disingenuous denial, of the role of race in police interactions.’”

During his speech, Barr likened police officers to soldiers in the Vietnam War, a comparison that dangerously advances the militarization of the police. He also analogized policing in “communities” to these soldiers returning home to a hostile environment following their deployment. This language perilously perpetuates and encourages an “us” versus “them” mentality among law enforcement officials that has no place in policing.

All communities, including communities of color who bear the brunt of police violence, have a constitutional right to question, challenge, and protest police misconduct and abuse. Barr’s suggestion that the exercise of that right comes at the expense of protection from the police is both a dereliction of public trust and a threat to public safety. Moreover, it is conduct that is wholly unbecoming of the chief law enforcement officer of the country.

Barr’s dangerous comments are consistent with this Department of Justice’s abdication of its responsibility to investigate the pattern or practice of racial discrimination perpetuated by law enforcement. Not long after former Attorney General Jeff Sessions was confirmed, he directed DOJ leadership [to review and limit](#) all police reform activities, including consent

decrees that resulted from pattern or practice investigations. He further attempted to obstruct the adoption and implementation of consent decrees in [Baltimore](#) and [Chicago](#), where systemic racial discrimination by law enforcement against communities of color is rampant.

“The countless examples of police violence – past and present – directed at communities of color throughout the country is reprehensible, making it all the more egregious for Attorney General Barr to suggest that law enforcement officials – who are not only public servants paid for with public funds, but also a group that has a documented history of brutality and misconduct toward communities of color – may choose to only provide services to communities that they feel ‘respect’ them,” said LDF Deputy Director of Policy and Director of State Advocacy Monique Dixon. “Law enforcement officials are accountable to the public, including communities of color who are too often cheated of the quality police services to which they are entitled. Police officers do not get to select which groups or communities receive their services – and the Attorney General’s suggestion that they engage in this behavior is ill-advised, dangerous, and in violation of the duties of his office.”

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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 and 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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