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LDF Sends Letter to Senate Judiciary Committee Supporting Nomination of Natasha Merle to the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of New York

Today, the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF) sent a letter to the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee in support of Natasha Merle’s nomination to the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of New York (EDNY). Ms. Merle currently serves as a Deputy Director of Litigation at LDF, where she has worked since 2016 and has built a distinguished record of defending both civil rights and the rule of law. The American Bar Association has also rated her well-qualified to serve on the District Court for the EDNY.

If confirmed, Ms. Merle would be the first public defender to serve on this Court in nearly 30 years, and only the second judge in the Court’s history to ever serve as a public defender. She would also be the sixth Black judge in the EDNY.

“Ms. Merle is eminently qualified to serve on the District Court for the Eastern District of New York. Throughout her career – including her time at LDF – she has exhibited a profound respect for the rule of law, the legal system, and the constitutional rights afforded to everyone in the United States,” said LDF President and Director-Counsel Janai S. Nelson.

“Public defenders,” Nelson continued, “play a vital role in protecting due process and American democracy – and we laud the President for recognizing the importance of having attorneys with this perspective reflected in our nation’s courts, with this and other judicial nominations. Ms. Merle’s experience representing the most vulnerable members of our society will provide a valuable and critically needed perspective to judicial decision making. Her reputation for fairness and collegiality, deep experience as a trial lawyer, and high ethical standards make her an excellent choice to serve on the federal district court. We urge the Senate Judiciary Committee to advance Ms. Merle’s nomination without delay.”

“As a civil rights attorney, Ms. Merle has devoted her career to public service and ensuring that all people have access to justice. Notably, Ms. Merle has an extensive record of protecting the fundamental right to vote,” said Lisa Cylar Barrett, Director of Policy at LDF. “Alongside her impeccable litigation credentials, as a colleague Ms. Merle has consistently exhibited the keen intellect, strong work ethic, and impartial temperament that makes her well qualified for a seat on the federal judiciary.”

At LDF, Ms. Merle has proven to be an exceptional civil rights litigator, deeply committed to the protection of democracy. She has practiced before federal and state courts at every level throughout the country, including before the U.S. Supreme Court; served as co-lead counsel in cases challenging restrictive voting policies amid the COVID-19 pandemic, issues of vote dilution, and violations of the Voting Rights Act; and recently served as lead counsel in *People v. Supreme Court of San Diego County*, in defense of a plaintiff’s right to access prosecutors’ jury selection notes to confirm peremptory strikes were not used to discriminate against Black prospective jurors.

After graduating from New York University School of Law cum laude in 2008, Ms. Merle clerked for the Hon. Robert L. Carter on the district court for the Southern District of New York, and then went on to provide defense to clients facing the death penalty as the Equal Justice Works Fellow at the Gulf Region Advocacy Center in Houston, and then as an Assistant Federal Public Defender in the Capital Habeas Unit in Arizona providing legal assistance to clients unable to afford their constitutional right to defense. Ms. Merle later completed a second clerkship with Judge Jon Gleeson of the Eastern District of N.Y. – the court to which she is now nominated – and then worked as a general litigator at Fried, Frank, Harris, Shriver & Jacobson LLP. Today, Ms. Merle maintains a robust teaching practice at Columbia Law School and her alma mater New York University School of Law, in addition to managing her substantial case load and managerial responsibilities at LDF.

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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. Follow LDF on [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#).