



For Immediate Release
Thursday, November 18, 2021

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LDF Statement on Oklahoma Governor Stitt Granting Clemency to Julius Jones

Today, Oklahoma Governor Kevin Stitt granted clemency to Julius Jones, a Black man who was scheduled to be executed by the state this afternoon for a murder conviction that is riddled with doubt. While Gov. Stitt halted Mr. Jones' execution, he did so by commuting Mr. Jones's sentence to life without the possibility of parole. This decision goes directly against the recommendation made by the Oklahoma Pardon and Parole Board, twice, that Mr. Jones be granted future opportunities for parole.

In response, Sherrilyn Ifill, President and Director-Counsel of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF), issued the following statement:

"We welcome with relief Governor Stitt's decision to commute the death sentence of Mr. Jones, who was scheduled to be executed for a crime of which he not only maintains his innocence, but for which the Oklahoma Pardon and Parole Board has acknowledged serious doubts. Indeed, the prosecution's star witness against Mr. Jones admitted to multiple people that he, and not Mr. Jones, shot and killed Paul Howell. Jury deliberations were also marred by egregious racial bias, which LDF highlighted in a letter urging the Governor to heed the Board's recommendation.

"But our legal system demands more than just sparing the life of Mr. Jones. Though he was not executed, according to the Governor's decision, Mr. Jones would remain imprisoned for the rest of his life for a crime he likely did not commit. This warrants continued examination of the case and a chance for Mr. Jones to prove his innocence. LDF is unequivocal in its belief that the death penalty is cruel and unusual punishment, that it is arbitrary, and that its implementation is rife with racial discrimination and other errors that violate the Eighth and Fourteenth Amendments of the Constitution. We are hopeful that the outpouring of outrage in response to Mr. Jones' plight leads to further examination — and the ultimate elimination — of the unjust death penalty system in our nation."

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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](#).