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LDF Statement on the Passing of Former Representative John Conyers

The NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF) salutes the life and work of former U.S. Representative John Conyers, a co-founder of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) and former chair of the House Judiciary and Oversight committees. Mr. Conyers served the people of Michigan for over 50 years in the United States Congress. He was re-elected 26 times as the representative for the state's now-13th congressional district.

Mr. Conyers served as a trailblazing and unrelenting civil rights advocate throughout his many years of public service. When he was first elected to the House in 1964, he became one of only six Black congressional representatives. In 1971, Conyers, along with 12 other African American members of the House, co-founded the Congressional Black Caucus, a coalition that works to advance a legislative agenda that promotes and protects the rights of African Americans and other marginalized communities.

Mr. Conyers introduced, sponsored, and fought to pass many ground-breaking pieces of civil rights legislation during his tenure. He introduced the Civil Rights Protection Act, the Commission to Study Reparation Proposals for African Americans Act, and the Violence Against Women Civil Rights Restoration Act during every session of Congress for many years, reflecting a decades-long commitment to advancing these bills. Indeed, Conyers first introduced the Reparation Proposal bill in 1989 – and ensured that it was re-introduced as part of the congressional record every term until he left office in 2017. When a hearing on reparations was finally held before the House Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights and Civil Liberties in June 2018, Rep. Conyers, who was by then retired, was acknowledged by Committee leadership as the hearing opened for his longstanding commitment to advancing a national dialogue on reparations.

Conyers also repeatedly championed voting rights legislation during his time in office. He supported the Voting Rights Act when it was introduced and passed in 1965. He was a key partner with civil rights groups in stewarding the 1982 reauthorization of the Voting Rights Act – widely regarded as one of the most successful modern civil rights legislative efforts. He also frequently advocated for the voting rights of formerly incarcerated individuals, including through repeatedly re-introducing the Civic Participation and Rehabilitation Act from 1999 onward.

The former congressman from Michigan also used his platform to ensure that the United States recognized the legacy and achievements of civil rights icons. In 1968, he began a 15-year campaign to make Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday a national holiday, a goal which he ultimately achieved in 1983 when President Reagan signed Mr. Conyers' MLK

Day bill into law. Conyers also hired Rosa Parks to work in his district office in Detroit in 1965 after she had relocated to the city. Conyers considered Parks a dear friend whom he admired greatly for her civil rights work – and his office employed Parks until her retirement in 1988.

Rep. Conyers resigned from his seat in 2017 at the age of 88, following misconduct allegations by several former female staffers.

LDF President and Director-Counsel, [Sherrilyn Ifill](#), says, “John Conyers was a steadfast advocate for civil rights during his years in the United States Congress.. As the longest-serving African American member of Congress and a co-founder of the Congressional Black Caucus, Mr. Conyers worked tirelessly year after year to elevate crucial civil rights legislation. His bills on reparations and felony disenfranchisement, among many others, helped ensure that important and unfinished civil rights policies were always part of the national conversation. Moreover, Representative Conyers’ unrelenting work to make Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s birthday a national holiday, and his decision to employ Rosa Parks in his district office for over 20 years, epitomizes the reverence he had for the leaders of the civil rights movement – and his commitment to carrying out their legacy. While we recognize and share profound concerns about the complaints made against Mr. Conyers in his final years in office, we cannot fail to recognize the breadth of his extraordinary contributions over 50 years to public service and to advancing the work of civil rights in the United States Congress. We mourn the loss of Mr. Conyers along with his family, friends, and colleagues and offer our deepest condolences to those who knew him.”

LDF Director of Policy, [Lisa Cylar Barrett](#), also reflects on the passing of former Representative Conyers and says, “John Conyers’ death is a profound loss for the civil rights community and the country as a whole. As a co-founder of the Congressional Black Caucus, Mr. Conyers was instrumental in advancing a policy agenda dedicated to securing and protecting equal rights for African Americans and other communities of color. His 53 years of public service are a testament to his abiding and passionate dedication to advancing civil rights in the United States.”

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