



**For Immediate Release**  
**May 12, 2023**

**LDF Media**  
212-965-2200 / [media@naacpldf.org](mailto:media@naacpldf.org)

**LDF Issues Letter to the Tennessee Department of Transportation Expressing Support for Black Farmers in Rural West Tennessee**

Today, the Legal Defense Fund (LDF) sent a letter to the Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT) addressing serious concerns following reports that the agency is abusing eminent domain to seize farmland from Black farmers in West Tennessee to build a highway to a new Ford electric vehicle plant known as BlueOval City.

“Black community members deserve to share equally in the economic opportunities generated by the new plant,” said Jason Bailey, LDF Assistant Counsel. “The number of Black farmers in Tennessee has already drastically declined after decades of government-sanctioned discrimination. The new construction provides the state with an opportunity to do right by its farmers. Instead, it has attempted to further dispossess them. It is time for the Tennessee Department of Transportation to provide fair compensation under the law and begin to correct course.”

In the letter, LDF encouraged TDOT to fairly compensate the farmers for their land. LDF also asked TDOT to guarantee that the proposed highway to BlueOval City is constructed in a manner that does not run afoul of the agency’s civil rights obligations under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

“We are concerned that the Tennessee Department of Transportation’s attempts to seize land from Black farmers may violate civil rights laws and the U.S. and Tennessee constitutions. Both constitutions prohibit the use of eminent domain to take private property without just compensation, which in this case is the fair market value,” said Amalea Smirniotopoulos, LDF Senior Policy Counsel. “One farmer was reportedly offered only \$8,165 for an acre of land that is likely worth at least \$200,000. Such severe undervaluation of land, along with reports that TDOT may be constructing the highway to BlueOval City in a manner that disproportionately impacts Black communities, raises serious concerns that TDOT is violating its obligations.”

Ford Motor Company announced its decision to build a 3,600-acre mega campus for manufacturing electric vehicles and batteries called BlueOval City in Stanton, Tennessee in September 2021. In a historic move, the Tennessee Legislature approved a nearly \$900 million incentive package to clear the way for the mega campus, also earmarking \$200 million for the state to construct roads leading to BlueOval City.

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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.*