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LDF Issues Statement on Attorney General Merrick Garland's Voting Rights Address

Today, United States Attorney General Merrick Garland delivered a policy address on voting rights and the work the Department of Justice (DOJ) is undertaking to protect and expand access to the ballot box. Sherrilyn Ifill, President and Director Counsel of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF), issued the following statement regarding the attorney general's address:

"We commend Attorney General Garland for bringing urgently-needed attention to the disgraceful and relentless threats to voting rights in this country, and highlighting the ways in which these efforts pointedly seek to suppress Black political participation. We are encouraged that the Department of Justice is taking this threat seriously and reaffirming its long-held duty of civil rights enforcement, including protecting and expanding the right to vote.

"The attorney general's commitment to enforcing all voting-related laws to ensure that every qualified voter can cast a ballot; doubling the size of the Civil Rights Division's enforcement staff; and scrutinizing all current and new voting laws for measures that curb voter access will help ensure that every eligible voter can cast a ballot and have it counted. Articulating this commitment clearly and unequivocally is a first step. We hope we will learn more in the coming weeks about the department's review and plans to fulfill the protections the Voting Rights Act extends to voters who have been subject to widespread voter suppression efforts.

"Attorney General Garland's pledge comes at a critical time. Since the 2020 general election, state legislators have ceaselessly introduced suppressive voting legislation throughout the country — in direct response to the election's unprecedented wave of Black political participation. Nearly 400 restrictive bills have been introduced in the 2021 legislative session — and 22 new suppressive laws have already been enacted in at least 14 states. Some of these laws, including those in Georgia and Florida, contain reprehensible provisions — reminiscent of those enacted during the shameful Jim Crow era — that directly target Black voters' ability to access the ballot box and participate in our democracy.

"While the DOJ's commitment to enforcing voting rights protections is critical, it can only go so far. Congress also has a duty to urgently act to ensure that we do not reach an intractable point of democratic backsliding. Lawmakers must immediately pass federal legislation, including the For the People Act (S. 1) and the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act (H.R. 4), to safeguard against unyielding voting rights infringements and guarantee equal political participation for all."

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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](#).