



For Immediate Release
Saturday, July 16, 2022

LDF Media
212-965-2200 / media@naacpldf.org

Nikole Hannah-Jones Reaches Settlement Agreement with the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Despite her exceptional and exemplary journalism credentials and having received a faculty recommendation of tenure for the Knight Foundation-endowed Chair in Race and Investigative Journalism, the Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Nikole Hannah-Jones was effectively and discriminatorily denied tenure in 2021 by the University of North Carolina (UNC) at Chapel Hill's Board of Trustees.

Although the Board ultimately reversed its initial decision, one that was loudly condemned on UNC's campus and across the United States, Ms. Hannah-Jones [declined the offer](#) and instead accepted Howard University's invitation to become its inaugural Knight Chair in Race and Reporting.

This week's settlement resolves any potential of legal action on behalf of Ms. Hannah-Jones against the university and its Trustees arising out of this incident.

Legal Defense Fund (LDF) President and Director-Counsel Janai S. Nelson issued the following statement on the settlement:

"The Legal Defense Fund and co-counsel Levy Ratner, P.C. and Ferguson Chambers & Sumter, P.A. are pleased to have reached a settlement agreement with the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill on behalf of our client, Pulitzer Prize winner Ms. Nikole Hannah-Jones.

"We believe this settlement is an important element of UNC's ongoing and much-needed work to address racial inequity at the university, and that it provides Ms. Hannah-Jones with the closure necessary to put this incident behind her. No less importantly, we believe that the settlement is a victory for the right to free expression — a cornerstone of our democracy that has too frequently been infringed or ignored when claimed by Black people and people from other marginalized groups."

The settlement agreement includes three important elements:

- **Inclusive search process:** The training of 20 UNC-Chapel Hill faculty and staff through its Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, as search and selection process advisers to play an active role in the development of positions, recruitment, screening, interviewing, references, evaluation, and integration of new employees.
- **Mental health counseling:** The posting of a position for an additional trauma-informed therapist with the Multicultural Health Program no later than July 31, 2022, and hiring a qualified applicant for this position.

- Reserved funds in the Provost’s Office: The reserving of \$5,000 each fiscal year through June 30, 2025, to be available through the Provost’s Office to pay reasonable expenses for meetings, events, and symposia sponsored by the Carolina Black Caucus upon review and approval by the UNC-Chapel Hill Vice Provost.

“Ms. Hannah-Jones filed a complaint with and was issued a right to sue letter by the EEOC and was prepared to litigate against her alma mater,” Nelson continued, “however, this settlement enables her to be made whole while contributing to improving the climate at the university. She looks forward to continuing her professional work committed to using the power of investigative journalism to expose the truth about the manifestations of racism in our society and training the next generation of aspiring journalists to do the same at her academic home of Howard University.”

###

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.