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LDF Welcomes Cecilia Marshall, Colleen Foster, and Cynthia Patton as New Members of Board of Directors

Today, the [Legal Defense Fund](#) (LDF) announced the addition of three new members to its Board of Directors: Cecilia Marshall, the granddaughter of LDF founder Thurgood Marshall and Director of External Partnerships at Partnership for Education Advancement; Colleen Foster, a former senior financial services director at Goldman Sachs; and Cynthia Patton, General Counsel and Secretary for Verily Life Sciences.

“Cecilia Marshall, Colleen Foster, and Cynthia Patton are tremendous additions to the LDF’s Board of Directors,” said Board co-chair Angela Vallot. “Their individual and collective experiences will play key roles in helping to advance the work of LDF, focused on a range of civil rights issues from protecting and advancing voting rights to reimagining our public safety system and investing in solutions that address the needs of our communities.”

“In Cecilia Marshall, Colleen Foster, and Cynthia Patton, the LDF Board of Directors is adding three dedicated leaders who are deeply committed to the work of racial justice,” said Board co-chair Kim Koopersmith. “Each brings with them unique attributes that will help guide LDF deep into the future and support the staff in our nation’s fight for equality. With ongoing attacks on the lived experiences of people of color, the rise of book bans, and ever-more aggressive attacks on reproductive rights and education equity, it is essential that all of us do our part to create a better future.”

“I am delighted by the additions of Cecilia Marshall, Colleen Foster, and Cynthia Patton, three important and successful leaders, all of whom are deeply committed to the racial justice and equity work that is the mission of the Legal Defense Fund,” said LDF President and Director-Counsel Janai Nelson. “I am especially excited to have Cecilia Marshall, who is the namesake and granddaughter of our recently departed LDF Board member and widow of our founder Thurgood Marshall, to steward the legacy of her grandparents. We are at an important moment in the history of our nation, and we are fortunate to have a board of leaders who are committed to supporting LDF and steering our nation toward full inclusivity and civil rights for all.”

Ms. Marshall follows in the footsteps of her late grandmother, Cecilia Suyat Marshall, who passed away in 2022 and was a member of the LDF Board for 34 years. Ms. Marshall’s work with Ed Advancement supports its mission to provide technology- and operations-focused solutions to mission driven colleges, including Historically Black Colleges and Universities. She has held senior roles at national non-profit and philanthropic organizations as a strategic leader in business growth, technology, communications, fundraising, and development. As managing director at the Asian and Pacific Islander American Scholarship Fund, Ms. Marshall oversaw the Gates/Millennium Scholarship program and strategic alliances with corporate foundations, private foundations, public charities, and individual donors.

At the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation, Ms. Marshall was brought in to lead an innovative portfolio of college access and success projects in service to the foundation's scholars and high achieving, low-income students across the nation. In 2020, she was hired by the Jackie Robinson Foundation as the Vice President of Program Development and Strategy where she was responsible for strategic planning of the Foundation's college scholarship program and the launch of its scaling initiative, (JRF) Impact.

"The Legal Defense Fund has been a critical, leading organization in transforming America for good and fighting for a more just society," said Ms. Marshall. "I am honored to serve on the LDF Board of Directors and steward its legacy of advancing racial justice and showing up for Black communities. My grandfather's words echo and spur me on as I accept this great honor and role: 'America must get to work. In the chill climate in which we live, we must go against the prevailing wind. We must dissent from the indifference. We must dissent because America can do better, because America has no choice but to do better.'"

Ms. Foster has 30 years of experience in the scalability of global financing and sales and trading marketplaces. Her passion for business building and relationship management spanned her career in both Global Markets and Investment Banking. Prior to Goldman Sachs, she started and built new business lines for both commodity trading houses and corporations focusing on client development, scalability, and brand recognition. She is a trusted advisor to Fortune 500 CEOs, business leaders, and investors through her deep knowledge and understanding of the complexities of the commodities markets.

Ms. Foster is a passionate and fierce women's health and human rights advocate serving as Treasurer to the Planned Parenthood Federation and Action Fund and their affiliate Planned Parenthood Great Northwest Hawaiian Islands Alaska Indiana and Kentucky. Her financial, business development, and investment banking background contributed significantly to protecting access to healthcare to underserved communities in the Midwest, Northwest, Alaska, Idaho, and Hawaii. She serves on the Board of PP Direct, a startup technology platform which provides reproductive healthcare services to patients through mobile technology.

"It is with excitement, joy and gratitude that I join Janai Nelson, the LDF team, and the Board of Directors," said Ms. Foster. "The work of LDF could not be more critical at a time where our basic civil rights, from voting rights to bodily autonomy to education, are being decimated by forces that resist an inclusive democracy. With LDF's leadership at the forefront, our communities, democracy and our resolve will be stronger. I am honored to fight for justice with this legacy institution."

Ms. Patton is a seasoned attorney and leader with a proven track record managing diverse and global teams through hyper-growth and transformation. She is a skilled navigator of complex global legal, compliance, regulatory, information security/data governance and safety matters developed over 35 years identifying, evaluating, and mitigating risk in the life sciences industry, including biopharma, hospital systems, and managed care organizations. She is known for her

communication and constructive influencing skills and ability to positively develop a culture of ethics and integrity within organizations.

Ms. Patton was honored with the 2019 ECI Carol R. Marshall Award for Innovation in Corporate Ethics and was recognized by BlackDoctor.org as one of the 2019 Top Blacks in Healthcare. She was named one of 2018's Most Influential Black Lawyers by Savoy Magazine's Most Influential Black Lawyers in 2018 and 2022 and was honored by the Black Women Lawyers Association of Los Angeles with the Corporate Excellence Award in 2018. In addition, Black Enterprise selected her for inclusion in the 2017 Black Enterprise Most Powerful Executives in Corporate America feature.

"I am thrilled to join the Board of the Legal Defense Fund and support the organization in its efforts to defend and advance racial justice," said Ms. Patton. "As an attorney, I know the power and potential that the law offers in the pursuit of justice. The staff at LDF works diligently towards achieving the promise of our democracy and the betterment of society. It is an honor to be a part of this organization's legacy and continued work."

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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.