FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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National Civil Rights Leaders Issue Letter to San Bernardino County District Attorney Demanding Termination of Deputy District Attorney Over Biased Statements

Leaders Also Call for Creation of a Conviction Review Unit to Review All Cases Assigned to the Deputy District Attorney and to Review Policies Established on His Watch

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Today, a coalition of leading national civil rights organizations issued a letter to San Bernardino County District Attorney Mike Ramos demanding the termination of Deputy District Attorney Michael Selyem over racist and biased statements aimed at African Americans and communities of color. The letter also calls for the immediate establishment of a Conviction Review Unit to conduct an independent review of all prior and current cases handled by Mr. Selyem to assess whether they may have been tainted by his discriminatory views, and to conduct a systemic review of all policies and practices of the office set during his tenure.

“Deputy District Attorney Selyem’s threats against U.S. Representative Maxine Waters are beyond the pale and, alarmingly, part of a larger pattern of vile rhetoric he’s directed at people of color,” said Sherrilyn Ifill, President and Director-Counsel of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF). “In a justice system already rife with racial discrimination and disparities, it is unacceptable for a district attorney’s office to allow a prosecutor with clear racial animus to continue representing the county. The San Bernardino County District Attorney must not only categorically condemn Selyem’s comments and hold him accountable, but the office must also conduct a thorough review to ensure that his personal bias did not infect the prosecution of any San Bernardino County residents and that department policies and practices themselves are not biased. Prosecutors’ offices around the country have an obligation to protect equal justice under the law, and that includes purging their ranks of those harboring racially discriminatory views.”

“Michael Selyem's discriminatory and racist remarks underscore just how much more work remains to be done to eliminate the scourge of racial bias that infects our criminal justice system today,” said Kristen Clarke, President and Executive Director of the Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law. “We demand swift action by the San Bernardino County District Attorney to confirm unequivocally that racism and bigotry have no place in his office, but that is only the first step. Full accountability must be focused on reviewing cases handled by Mr. Selyem and ensuring that the policies and practices of the District Attorney’s office are fair and just toward all communities. Action is needed now to restore the public's confidence in an office that has been tainted by the violent, discriminatory and vile remarks of one of its leaders.”

“Keeping Deputy District Attorney Selyem on payroll after his disqualifying attacks on Americans of color and a respected U.S. Congresswoman shows the outrageous complacency of our law enforcement mechanisms in addressing even the most outright bigotry in our criminal justice system,” said the Rev. Al Sharpton, Founder and President of National Action
Network (NAN). “This kind of hatred has no place anywhere in America, and certainly not in an office of the law. We stand in solidarity with communities of color across America in calling for Deputy DA Selyem’s immediate termination. Failure to ensure accountability for his hate-filled remarks flies in the face of the office’s duty-bound obligation to uphold the letter and spirit of the law.”

San Bernardino County’s African American residents are roughly five times more likely to be incarcerated than White residents. African American children in San Bernardino County are nearly four times more likely to be arrested for truancy than white children, and almost one and a half times more likely to be arrested for breaking curfew than white children. These disparities are also evidenced in prosecutorial patterns of the San Bernardino County District Attorney's Office.

In addition to social media posts mocking Mexican immigrants, Selyem, who joined the D.A.’s Office 12 years ago and handles gang prosecutions in San Bernardino County, used crude and profane language targeting U.S. Rep. Maxine Waters.

The full letter can be viewed here.

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About the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund (LDF)

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 multidisciplinary 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.

About the Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law:

The Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law (Lawyers’ Committee), a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization, was formed in 1963 at the request of President John F. Kennedy to involve the private bar in providing legal services to address racial discrimination. Now in its 55th year, the Lawyers’ Committee is continuing its quest to “Move America Toward Justice.” The principal mission of the Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law is to secure, through the rule of law, equal justice for all, particularly in the areas of criminal justice, fair housing and community development, economic justice, educational opportunities, and voting rights. For more information, please visit https://lawyerscommittee.org.

About National Action Network

National Action Network is one of the leading civil rights organizations in the nation with chapters throughout the entire United States. Founded in 1991 by Reverend Al Sharpton, NAN
works within the spirit and tradition of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to promote a modern civil rights agenda that includes the fight for one standard of justice, decency and equal opportunities for all people regardless of race, religion, nationality or gender. For more information go to www.nationalactionnetwork.net.

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