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LDF President and Directors-Counsel Issue Statements on Passing of Rev. Dr. Calvin Butts

In reaction to today's passing of Rev. Dr. Calvin Butts, the current and former President and Directors-Counsel of the [Legal Defense Fund](#) (LDF) – many of whom were close to Rev. Butts – issued the following statements:

Janai Nelson, current LDF President and Director-Counsel:

“We send our most sincere condolences to the family, friends, and faith community of Rev. Dr. Calvin Butts. Reverend Butts was a trailblazing force in Harlem and across New York for generations, as well as a national icon of spiritual social justice and civil rights activism. He was also a cherished supporter and friend of LDF. He served the Abyssinian Baptist Church, its congregation, and his community for more than three decades and inspired countless leaders and worshipers around the world. We celebrate Rev. Butts' legacy, mourn his loss, and stand in sympathy with all those he impacted throughout his life and career.”

Sherrilyn Ifill, LDF's seventh President and Director-Counsel:

“The platform of the pulpit at Abyssinian was a big one. It requires a leader of vision and power. In the tradition of its former pastor Rep. Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., the Reverend Calvin Butts understood the kind of leadership Harlem expects and needs from this great church. And he delivered. Just last year we strategized together about the response of the Black church to hate crimes – and particularly to anti-Asian violence – in our city. He was always ready to demonstrate solidarity and resolve.”

Ted Shaw, LDF's fifth President and Director-Counsel:

“As Pastor of the Abyssinian Baptist Church, Rev. Butts was a force in the Harlem community. For decades he worked to improve education, employment, economic development, housing, health care and every aspect of life for the people of Harlem. I was not the first LDF Director-Counsel to have been pastored by Rev. Butts; during their time in New York, Julius and Vivian Chambers worshiped at Abyssinian. Other LDF staff members have been and are members of Abyssinian under Rev. Butts. Among the many things that I loved about Calvin Butts was his love of Black people. He was what W.E.B. DuBois called ‘a race man.’ He loved the struggle for equality, the literature and poetry of Black people, the various genres of Black music, the ways of Black folk. I loved Rev. Butts, and I shall miss him.”

Elaine Jones, LDF's fourth President and Director-Counsel:

“Throughout my tenure as head of the LDF (1993-2004), Calvin Butts was steadfast and true to both LDF and me. He never said ‘no’ – not to an invitation to give opening and closing prayers at numerous LDF events, to attending meetings and conferences discussing impact of clergy on development of civil rights law, and to traveling to the nation's capital promoting civil rights legislation. Losing those who care about our history and the downtrodden, who act upon that

caring, those who are intellectually gifted and biblically centered is a bitter pill. I will remember him with admiration appreciation and love always.”

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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.