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**LDF Mourns the Loss of Thelma Mothershed Wair,
Historic Member of the Little Rock Nine**

The [Legal Defense Fund \(LDF\)](#) is deeply saddened by the death of Thelma Mothershed Wair, a member of the historic Little Rock Nine who integrated Central High School in Little Rock, Ark. in 1957. The momentous group was met with violent confrontation and backlash as the first Black students to integrate the school after the Supreme Court's watershed ruling in [Brown v. Board](#) three years earlier. Mrs. Mothershed Wair passed away at 83 years old in Little Rock on Oct. 19, 2024.

LDF President and Director Counsel Janai Nelson issued the following statement:

“It is with heavy hearts that we mourn the loss of Thelma Mothershed Wair, a national hero and steadfast advocate in the Civil Rights Movement whose courage to integrate Little Rock’s Central High School paved the way for justice and change throughout the nation. Though confronted with racist mobs and violence on what was meant to be their first day of school on September 4, 1957, Mrs. Mothershed Wair and her fellow classmates bravely continued to show up – fighting for the country’s true potential to fulfill its constitutional ideals. Just 16 years old, Mrs. Mothershed Wair met the massive resistance to desegregation with grace, defying severe racial discrimination and paving the way for equality and fairness within America’s public schools. In the decades thereafter, Mrs. Mothershed Wair served and volunteered as a teacher, instructor, and counselor, continuing to signify her dedication to education, youth, and community.

“The bravery, strength, and resolve of Thelma Mothershed Wair and the other members of the Little Rock Nine transformed America and led to the cultivation of not only their own educations, but the educational growth and opportunity of all children. We will continue to honor Mrs. Mothershed Wair’s legacy by relentlessly defending the rights of all students to access quality, equitable education.”

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Legal Defense Fund (LDF) - 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.