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

Civil Rights Groups Demand Reform for Black and Latinx Students and Students with Disabilities Subject to Discriminatory School Discipline

Today, several state and national civil rights groups sent a letter to Prince George's County Public Schools (PGCPS) demanding changes to its discriminatory and exclusionary discipline policies before students return to school in the fall, citing concerns that the COVID-19 pandemic will worsen existing problems with the school district's overly punitive responses to the behavior of students of color and students with disabilities. This letter follows up on previous correspondence sent on March 25, 2019. The letter also calls on PGCPS to end its practice of stationing police officers in schools, as part of larger reform efforts in the aftermath of mass protests against police violence in the Black community.

"Police officers in Prince George's County Public Schools send a message to Black and Brown youth that they are threats in need of policing rather than children in need of an education," said Cara McClellan, Assistant Counsel at the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF). "For too long, PGCPS has overly relied on suspensions, expulsions, and school police to punish instead of support students of color and students with disabilities, even when their behavior stems from unmet social, emotional, and academic needs. Added to these existing injustices are the harms associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, leaving us with no confidence that vulnerable students will be adequately supported when schools reopen."

While all students are exposed to the trauma of COVID-19, Black children, as well as children from low-income families, are more likely to experience severe trauma from the pandemic in light of the stark racial disparities associated with COVID-19 infection, illness, and death. Indeed, a recent study found that COVID-19 infection rates are five times higher in majority-minority zip codes than in white neighborhoods. Black Americans are also more likely to die from the virus than white Americans, which means that Black students are at increased risk of losing family and other community members to the pandemic. Notably, Prince George's County has been significantly impacted by COVID-19, with the most cases and second-most deaths of any county in Maryland.

"The COVID-19 crisis has exacerbated our concerns about discriminatory discipline practices in PGCPS that exclude Black and Latinx students and students with disabilities," said Bob Ross, President of the Prince George's County Branch of the NAACP. "Our letter demands that the district act immediately to support the needs of students of color and students with disabilities to ensure they are not subject to unfair disciplinary procedures. We call on PGCPS to invest in counselors instead of cops."

The letter requests that PGCPs create a plan to support Black and Latinx students and students with disabilities as they transition back into school buildings. Among other measures, this plan must include removal of school resource officers from all schools; increased funding for psychologists and counselors; improved procedures for identifying students in need of support, with particular attention to their unique needs related to the COVID-19 pandemic; and effective social, emotional, and behavioral supports for students with special education needs as alternatives for exclusionary discipline.

Read a copy of our letter [here](#).

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Founded in 1940, the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF) is the nation's first civil and human rights law organization. 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. 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 NAACP Legal Defense Fund or LDF.

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