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**LDF, SPLC, and ADAP File Federal Lawsuit Challenging Alabama’s
Lack of Safe and Accessible Voting During COVID-19 Pandemic**

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. – Today, the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF), the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), and the Alabama Disabilities Advocacy Program (ADAP) filed a [federal lawsuit](#) against Alabama Governor Kay Ivey, Secretary of State John Merrill, and others over the state’s lack of safe and accessible voting processes amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The lawsuit was filed on behalf of People First of Alabama, Greater Birmingham Ministries, the Alabama State Conference of the NAACP, and four individual voters with medical conditions that make them especially vulnerable to death or serious illness from COVID-19. The lawsuit requests that the court instruct state officials to make absentee and in-person voting more accessible to protect the health and safety of Alabama voters.

The lawsuit also notes that these measures are particularly important for older voters, voters with disabilities, and African American voters, who have been severely and disproportionately affected by COVID-19. Despite making up around one-fourth of the state’s population, Black people account for 45 percent of Alabama’s COVID-19-related deaths.

“No one should have to choose between their life or their vote,” said LDF Senior Counsel Deuel Ross. “These burdensome voting requirements weigh heavily on Alabamians during all elections. But requiring voters to comply with these restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic needlessly endangers lives. We strongly encourage Governor Ivey and Secretary Merrill to protect voters by adopting procedures that limit voters’ potential exposure to COVID-19.”

LDF, the SPLC, and ADAP, in conjunction with Greater Birmingham Ministries and the Alabama State NAACP, previously sent [a letter](#) to Secretary Merrill on March 19, 2020 regarding the need for a comprehensive plan to safeguard voters through 2020. When the Secretary’s office did not respond, the organizations sent [a follow-up](#) correspondence on April 17, 2020. That follow-up also received no response.

“Many individuals with disabilities will be unable to enter a polling place or meet the demands of typical absentee voting in Alabama during the 2020 election cycle due to COVID-19,” said William Van Der Pol, Senior Trial Counsel at ADAP. “These vulnerable individuals are being required to make a life or death choice of foregoing the fundamental right of access to the ballot, or risk death or serious illness.”

“In the midst of a pandemic, Alabama can make our elections more secure, more efficient, and more accessible to all eligible voters while still protecting public health and safety. Instead, Secretary Merrill and Governor Ivey have put the health of voters at risk, especially older voters, Black voters, and voters with disabilities, simply for exercising their fundamental right to vote,” said Caren Short, Senior Staff Attorney for the SPLC. “State officials of both parties across the nation have taken decisive steps to expand absentee voting, waive onerous absentee ballot rules, and increase early voting opportunities. We are filing today’s lawsuit to ensure that Alabama voters are not forced to choose between their health and their vote.”

“From the earliest days of the pandemic,” said Eric M. Peebles, PhD, a plaintiff in the lawsuit, “it has been well-documented that individuals with special healthcare needs are among those at greatest risk for contracting the deadly coronavirus. The evolution of this virus will continue to impact our lives in ways we have yet to conceive. We must ensure that our citizens with even the most complex disabilities can exercise the full rights of citizenship without coercion or exploitation by others.”

Read the full complaint [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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The Southern Poverty Law Center, based in Alabama with offices in Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Washington, D.C., is a nonprofit civil rights organization dedicated to fighting hate and bigotry, and to seeking justice for the most vulnerable members of society. For more information, visit www.splcenter.org/.