



For Immediate Release
Tuesday, February 8, 2022

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

LDF & Other Advocates Oppose Louisiana AG's Motion to Dissolve Historic Decree Ensuring Black Electoral Representation on Louisiana Supreme Court

Today, on behalf of Ronald Chisom, Marie Bookman, and the Urban League of Louisiana, the [NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc.](#) (LDF), the law firm Cozen O'Connor, and Louisiana civil rights attorneys, William Quigley, Ronald Wilson, and John Adcock, [filed](#) an opposition to Louisiana Attorney General Jeff Landry's motion to dissolve the Consent Decree in the landmark *Chisom* litigation (known as the "Chisom Consent Decree").

The Chisom Consent Decree was adopted by a federal court in 1992 to ensure that Black voters in the state have an equal opportunity to elect candidates of their choice to the Louisiana Supreme Court. Before advocates filed the *Chisom* lawsuit, no Black person had ever been elected to the Louisiana Supreme Court. The decree, issued following the landmark 1991 United States Supreme Court ruling in *Chisom v. Roemer*, provided a remedy for racial vote dilution in Louisiana's election of its state Supreme Court justices, by ordering a new map that contained a district comprised of a majority of Black voters anchored in Orleans Parish. The case has its roots in Louisiana's long history of discrimination in access to the judicial branch.

As a direct result of the Consent Decree, Black voters in Orleans Parish have successfully elected candidates of their choice to the Louisiana Supreme Court: Justice Revius O. Ortique Jr. (1992-1994); Chief Justice Bernette J. Johnson (1994-2020); and Justice Piper D. Griffin (2020-present).

"As an original plaintiff, I brought suit because Louisiana's Supreme Court was an all-white body and because the system denied Black voters — including those in Orleans Parish, which then and now has a sizeable Black population — the ability to elect their candidates of choice," said Ronald Chisom. "Because of the Consent Decree, Black voters have been able to have a justice of their choice on the Supreme Court. It's true that some things have changed between then and now; but systemic racism still exists and not nearly enough has happened to make the Consent Decree unnecessary."

"The *Chisom* Decree is an essential tool for maintaining the bare minimum of inclusivity that Black voters are due on Louisiana's Supreme Court," said LDF

Deputy Director of Litigation Leah Aden. “Quite simply, the decree has worked, and is still needed today given the concerning levels of racially polarized voting patterns and continued racial discrimination in Louisiana.”

The State does not come close to satisfying its burden of demonstrating that the remedy it seeks—the complete dissolution of the Consent Decree—is warranted. It presents no evidence of changed circumstances that would support disturbing the decree and it has not shown that the fundamental purpose of the decree has been satisfied. In fact, the State has not even attempted to show that, absent the decree, there would not be an immediate return to a violation of the Voting Rights Act or the Constitution that necessitated the decree.

“The right to vote is sacred. We must remain vigilant and steadfast in our defense of that right,” said longtime Louisiana civil rights attorney Ron Wilson. “Towards that end, we are filing an opposition to prevent the dissolution of the Consent Decree which gave life to Louisiana’s only African American Supreme Court Judicial District.”

“The State has not given any compelling legal or factual reasons for dissolving the Consent Decree,” said Cozen O’Connor Partner Michael B. de Leeuw. “On the other hand, there are a number of clear and compelling reasons for the Consent Decree to remain in place and protect the hard-won rights of Louisianans.”

“It’s vital that we do not let our state’s Supreme Court become less representative of the people it’s made to serve than it is already,” said President & CEO of the Urban League of Louisiana Judy Reese Morse. “The court decides cases with major ramifications for so many essential issues in our communities — from access to justice to health care to employment and so much more. It would be wrong to allow such a powerful institution to become less representative of Louisianans.”

Mr. Chisom and Ms. Bookman were original plaintiffs in the *Chisom* lawsuit and are continuing as plaintiffs in this action, joined by the Urban League of Louisiana.

###

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 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. Follow LDF on [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#).