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LDF Media
media@naacpldf.org

**LDF Mourns the Loss of Reverend James M. Lawson Jr.,
Groundbreaking Civil Rights Leader**

The Legal Defense Fund (LDF) is deeply saddened by the death of Reverend James M. Lawson Jr., a pioneering civil rights leader who worked steadfastly to advance racial justice throughout his lifetime. Rev. Lawson Jr. passed away at 95 years old in Los Angeles, California.

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

“It is with heavy hearts that we mourn the loss of Reverend James M. Lawson Jr., the renowned civil rights leader whose visionary leadership to end segregation and advance racial justice led to transformational change throughout our nation. We extend our deepest condolences to his loved ones.

“With intrepid dedication and compassion, Rev. Lawson demonstrated a commitment to bettering our nation that inspired many. As one of the chief architects of the civil rights movement, Rev. Lawson broke new ground and forged a path forward for our country with courage and hope. Rev. Lawson was a brilliant strategist who Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. called the “lead theorist” of nonviolent resistance. His groundbreaking work took many forms. Rev. Lawson mentored the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. He devised desegregation plans throughout the South, including the Freedom Rides. In *Garza v. County of Los Angeles* (1990), a case LDF litigated, Rev. Lawson served as a plaintiff in defense of voting rights. At every step, Rev. Lawson laid the foundation for change by challenging our country to live up to its ideals.

“We celebrate and reflect on Rev. Lawson’s life—defined by passion, courage, and audacious spirit—with immense gratitude. We must carry on Reverend Lawson’s legacy by continuing to work in service of communities to advance equality and justice for all.”

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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.