



**For Immediate Release**  
**May 5, 2020**

**LDF Media**  
212-965-2200 / [media@naacpldf.org](mailto:media@naacpldf.org)

### **LDF Condemns the NYPD's Disparate Social Distancing Enforcement Following Multiple Arrests of Black Residents This Weekend**

The NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF) strongly condemns the New York City Police Department's (NYPD) targeting of and excessive use of force in Black and Brown communities in connection with the enforcement of social distancing rules, and demands accountability for this unlawful conduct. This weekend, the NYPD announced it would deploy 1,000 officers across New York City to enforce social distancing rules to prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus. Instead of equitably assisting communities across the city with the supplies necessary to comply with social distancing rules, several NYPD officers resorted to the same racially-biased and violent policing practices that have led to distrust between the NYPD and communities of color, while reportedly selectively distributing supplies to predominantly white crowds.

On Saturday, NYPD officers violently attacked and arrested multiple people of color in Manhattan's East Village as they enforced COVID-19 social distancing restrictions. During one of these arrests, Officer Francisco Garcia brutally assaulted a young Black man, Mr. Donni Wright, because Mr. Wright allegedly violated social distancing rules. Mr. Wright was charged with felony assault on a police officer, menacing, resisting arrest, obstructing governmental administration, and disorderly conduct, but, after video footage revealed that Officer Garcia was the assailant, Mr. Wright was released from custody and all charges against him were reportedly deferred pending further investigation.

By contrast, in the West Village this weekend, NYPD officers were photographed handing out personal protective equipment to white residents. These disparate police interactions, including the abuse endured by Mr. Wright, reveal the NYPD's racially discriminatory approach to social distancing enforcement, whereby New Yorkers of color are harassed and brutalized, and white and more affluent communities in the city are protected and supported. LDF demands immediate accountability for these instances of racially-motivated police violence and harassment — and asks that the department consult with communities across the city to overhaul its approach to enforcement of social distancing protocols.

“The violent arrest of a young Black man for allegedly violating social distancing rules over the weekend is egregious and unacceptable. At a moment when officers of the NYPD should be demonstrating leadership in protecting and calming city residents during this public health crisis, we are instead seeing the longstanding issue of racially disparate police interactions occurring throughout the city. This has resulted in aggressive, violent treatment of African American and Latino residents by some officers of the NYPD, while

white residents in violation of social distancing guidelines are treated with support and respect. This conduct is a betrayal of the public trust and a fundamental violation of the sworn commitment to ‘protect and serve’ all city residents that stains the entire department,” said Sherrilyn Ifill, LDF’s President and Director-Counsel. “Police Commissioner Shea and Mayor de Blasio must reconsider the role of law enforcement in the enforcement of social distancing rules and consult with public health officials on the best ways to educate and persuade New Yorkers to remain safe during this international pandemic. The Commissioner must publicly articulate the steps he intends to take to ensure that officers of the NYPD do not engage in abusive and biased policing under the guise of enforcing social distancing guidelines, and lay out his plan for using disciplinary procedures that promptly punish officers who violate this commitment.”

Notably, the violent arrest of Mr. Wright is not Officer Garcia’s first incident of abusive policing. Reportedly, he has been named in at least seven civil lawsuits since 2015. In one instance, he wrongfully arrested and used excessive force against a Black man who was visiting a public housing resident, which ultimately resulted in a \$27,000 settlement. This settlement occurred during the same period that LDF sued the NYPD because of similar unlawful policing incidents involving Black and Latinx public housing residents and their guests. Nevertheless, Officer Garcia was allowed to remain on the force and continue to police Black neighborhoods.

LDF calls on Mayor Bill de Blasio and Police Commissioner Dermot Shea to thoroughly investigate all officers involved in the interaction with Mr. Wright and others, including Officer Garcia, whose record of excessive force warrants his immediate termination. Additionally, we urge Mayor de Blasio to explore and adopt alternative, public health-centered mechanisms for social distancing enforcement.

###

*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.*

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