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LDF President and Director-Counsel Sherrilyn Ifill Calls on Congress to Expand and Improve Voting Options Amid the COVID-19 Pandemic

Today, Sherrilyn Ifill, President and Director-Counsel of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF), testified at the Committee on House Administration's Subcommittee on Elections' hearing titled, "The Impact of COVID-19 on Voting Rights and Election Administration: Ensuring Safe and Fair Elections." Ms. Ifill made several recommendations for ensuring that Americans' access to the ballot box in November, whether through in-person or alternative voting methods, is safe and secure during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"This pandemic is not only a public health emergency and economic crisis, it is also a threat to the very foundation of our democracy: free and fair elections," Ms. Ifill remarked in her written testimony. "The devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and its disproportionate impact on Black voters, requires that Congress implement responsive measures for election administration and provide the necessary funding and resources to ensure that every eligible American can register and vote, that every ballot cast by an eligible voter is counted, that each and every election is secure, safe, and accessible."

Ms. Ifill recommended three ways Congress can help ensure that Americans have multiple options for safely and successfully exercising their right to vote in November. First, she stressed that mail-in voting must be more accessible to all voters, so that those who wish to avoid potential COVID-19 exposure through in-person voting can still easily cast their ballots.

"Congress must ensure that there are no barriers which prevent, impede, or make burdensome a voter's ability to vote by mail. Mail-in ballot options should be made available to all registered voters, not just those on absentee voter lists ... [Furthermore], options for requesting, receiving, and returning mail-in ballots should be expanded, while maintaining the security of the voting system."

Second, Ms. Ifill emphasized that Congress must also ensure that there are expanded and safer options for in-person voting for Americans who either prefer to cast their ballots this way or cannot access mail-in voting. To achieve this objective, Ms. Ifill suggested that Congress expand voter registration options to include online and same-day voter registration, as stay-at-home orders have made it challenging to register to vote during the pandemic. Ms. Ifill also indicated that Congress should expand the early voting period for all states and make the "option of curbside voting more readily available" to "reduce crowd size around polling stations and therefore reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmittal."

Finally, Ms. Ifill underscored that Congress must “encourage states and jurisdictions to conduct public education campaigns” to ensure that Americans are aware of their voting options during the pandemic – and to prevent the spread of inaccurate or manipulated information that could lead to voter suppression.

“For many people, this will be their first time voting by mail and, for most voters, this will be the first time voting in a pandemic. Voters must be aware of and understand each step of the voting-by-mail process so that people feel comfortable using that option should they choose to do so. Furthermore, people opting to vote in person must be made aware of updated polling site information and assured of safety measures implemented so that they are not be disenfranchised by lack of information or fear of contracting the virus.”

Read Ms. Ifill’s written testimony [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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