



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

Center for Children's Advocacy
860-301-5419 / Martha Stone

For Immediate Release
Friday, January 10, 2020

Agreement Reached in Connecticut School Desegregation Case

On behalf of Elizabeth Horton Sheff and other Black, Latinx, and white families, the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF), the Center for Children's Advocacy, the American Civil Liberties Union, the National Center for Law and Economic Justice, and Horton, Dowd, Bartschi & Levesque, PC have reached a new landmark agreement in *Sheff v. O'Neill*. *Sheff* is a longstanding school desegregation case against the State of Connecticut that seeks to address the extreme racial and economic segregation of students in the city of Hartford in relation to its surrounding suburbs.

The new agreement adds up to 1,052 new magnet school seats, including a new middle school at the Riverside Magnet School and new prekindergarten classes at a Hartford host magnet and the Academy of Aerospace and Engineering Elementary School. Nearly 600 of these new seats are reserved for students from Hartford. Additionally, among other funding, Connecticut is furnishing \$1.1 million for magnet schools to develop new themes to recruit more diverse student bodies, \$800,000 to provide academic and social support for Hartford students participating in the Open Choice program, and an additional \$300,000 as incentives for suburbs that agree to accept more Hartford students.

"This agreement reaffirms the parties' commitment to racial integration and moves the needle forward by expanding opportunities for hundreds of Hartford students," said Martha Stone, executive director of the Center for Children's Advocacy. She has represented the plaintiffs since the case began in 1989.

In 1996, the Connecticut Supreme Court ruled that the extreme racial segregation between the predominately Black, Latinx, and low-income schools in Hartford and the overwhelmingly white and high- or middle-income schools in the surrounding suburbs violated the Connecticut State Constitution.

Since the early 2000s, a series of agreements between the plaintiffs and the State have established nearly 40 inter-district magnet schools and a robust Open Choice program, which allows Hartford students to transfer to suburban schools. Today, over 44% of Hartford students attend a magnet or Open Choice school.

The new agreement lasts until June 2022 and seeks to place 47.5% of Hartford students in integrated schools. Before this agreement expires, the plaintiffs and the State will develop a long-term plan to take effect in 2022 and ensure that every Hartford student

has the option of attending a quality, integrated school. The State is required to set up an advisory committee made up of experienced educators to provide guidance in the implementation of the *Sheff* programs.

“When we advocate for quality, integrated education, we are fighting to ensure that all students — no matter the color of their skin or whether they are rich or poor — receive the kind of education that they deserve,” said Elizabeth Horton Sheff, the lead plaintiff in the case. “All students benefit from learning together. This is a question of social justice, not just education.”

The agreement also adopts a new lottery system to ensure that the magnet schools have a diverse group of students from all income levels. It further requires more public reporting and transparency to help families make better decisions when applying to magnet and Open Choice schools.

“This agreement is an important step forward in our longstanding effort to end the racial and economic segregation of the Hartford area school system,” said Deuel Ross, Senior Counsel at LDF. “We look forward to working with state officials to develop a comprehensive, long-term plan to guarantee that all Hartford students have equal access to a quality education.”

###

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](#).