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LDF Mourns the Loss of Attorney Ralph Kennedy Frasier, Pioneering Champion for Civil Rights

The [Legal Defense Fund](#) (LDF) is deeply saddened by the death of Ralph Kennedy Frasier, the trailblazing civil rights advocate and attorney. Mr. Frasier passed away at 85 years old on May 8, 2024, in Jacksonville, Florida.

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

“It is with profound sadness that we acknowledge the loss of attorney Ralph Kennedy Frasier, a pioneering champion for civil rights. We also extend our deepest condolences to his loved ones during this difficult time. Mr. Frasier’s groundbreaking, lifelong commitment to advancing equality and justice reverberated throughout the South and the nation.

“Through his fervent courage and passion, Mr. Frasier bravely broke barriers at just 17 years of age by becoming one of the first African American undergraduate students to desegregate UNC Chapel Hill, the oldest public university in the United States. Mr. Frasier was represented by LDF Founder Thurgood Marshall and attorney Robert Carter in *Frasier vs. Board of Trustees of University of North Carolina* (1955), the first desegregation lawsuit to follow the Supreme Court’s decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). In this esteemed capacity, Mr. Frasier’s steadfast dedication opened doors for so many.

“Mr. Frasier would continue to be an ardent defender of civil rights. After going on to earn his bachelor’s and law degrees from North Carolina Central University and serve in the United States Army, Mr. Frasier enjoyed a distinguished career as an attorney. He also held many leadership positions in not-for-profit and public sector institutions with a focus on educational equity, and community. At every step on a remarkably trailblazing path, Mr. Frasier acted boldly to advance a more just society for all.

“Mr. Frasier will be remembered as a fearless, compassionate leader whose vision and determination in challenging a deeply entrenched system of racism transformed access to higher education and in turn, the future of our multi-racial democracy. He leaves behind an indelible legacy that will undoubtedly have a lasting impact on generations to come.”

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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.