



**For Immediate Release**  
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### **LDF Files Amicus Brief Urging United States Supreme Court to Halt Execution of Marcellus “Khaliifah” Williams**

Tonight, Marcellus “Khaliifah” Williams is scheduled to be executed by the State of Missouri, unless the U.S. Supreme Court intervenes. There is compelling evidence that Mr. Williams is innocent of the crime of which he was convicted and for which he is facing execution. Moreover, the proceedings in his case were rife with errors that violated Mr. Williams’ constitutional rights and further call into question the reliability of his capital murder conviction.

This morning, LDF [filed](#) an amicus brief with the U.S. Supreme Court in support of Mr. Williams’ request for a stay of execution. The brief demonstrates that Mr. Williams’ conviction was tainted by unconstitutional racial discrimination, as the prosecutor recently acknowledged for the first time that he struck a prospective juror in part because, like Mr. Williams, he was a young Black man with glasses. The brief further explains that racial discrimination in the jury selection process imposes serious harms on our entire legal system and undermines public confidence in the integrity of our courts.

In a rare move, Williams’ lawyers and St. Louis County Prosecuting Attorney Wesley Bell filed a joint brief this past Saturday, Sept. 21, asking the Missouri Supreme Court to stay his execution and send the case back to the lower courts for a “more comprehensive hearing.” The victim’s family also opposes Mr. Williams’ execution.

Earlier this year, St. Louis Prosecuting Attorney Wesley Bell filed a motion to overturn Mr. Williams’ conviction. In a subsequent evidentiary hearing, DNA evidence that could have exonerated Mr. Williams was found to have been contaminated by the prosecution team. Mr. Williams then reached a plea deal for a sentence of life without parole, but the Missouri Supreme Court blocked this agreement at the urging of the Missouri Attorney General’s Office.

Yesterday, the Missouri Supreme Court and Missouri Governor Mike Parsons both rejected pleas to halt the execution of Mr. Williams.

In response to Mr. Williams’ impending execution date, [Legal Defense Fund](#) (LDF) Director of Litigation Samuel Spital made the following statement:

“The criminal legal system has already failed Marcellus ‘Khaliifah’ Williams multiple times. We cannot let it fail him again. Mr. Williams was sentenced to death despite a process marred by racial bias, prosecutorial misconduct, and contaminated evidence. The jury discrimination in Mr. Williams’ case reflects an insidious and persistent pattern of Black people being systemically excluded from capital juries throughout the history of America’s death penalty. The prosecutor’s decision to strike a Black prospective juror on the basis of race deprived Mr. Williams of his constitutional right to a fair trial and has placed his life in jeopardy.

“We oppose the death penalty in all circumstances. While the U.S. Supreme Court has allowed the practice to continue, it has insisted that it will engage in ‘unceasing efforts’ to ensure that death sentences are not tainted by racial discrimination. Allowing Mr. Williams’ execution to go forward would make a mockery of that commitment. We urge the Supreme Court to act in the interests of justice and spare Mr. Williams’ life.”

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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.*