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*****FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE*****

LDF, The Legal Aid Society Demand that Officers Stop Concealing Their Shield Numbers

(New York, NY) - Today, the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF) and The Legal Aid Society (LAS) sent a letter to the New York City Law Department, demanding that the New York City Police Department (NYPD) immediately instruct all officers to remove any covering that obstructs public view of their shield numbers and to provide identifying information when required on patrol. Failure to comply with these requests violates the NYPD's own Patrol Guide and New York City law.

Following George Floyd's killing at the hands of the Minneapolis Police Department, protests demanding an end to police violence and racially discriminatory policing have taken place across New York City and throughout the country. Recent reports indicate that NYPD officers are obscuring their shield numbers with black tape or other opaque material, making them unreadable. Moreover, some NYPD officers have refused to respond to requests for identifying information and failed to cite a reason for their arrest.

"Obscuring an officer's shield number hinders public accountability and opens the door for police misconduct," said Jin Hee Lee, LDF's Senior Deputy Director of Litigation. "It is particularly egregious to cover shield numbers amid protests for police accountability, where peaceful protesters have been met with unwarranted and excessive force. This only reinforces the protesters' rightful message that systemic police reform is needed immediately, especially given the extremely disproportionate impact of police violence in the Black community."

“Hiding badge numbers and refusing to provide business cards amid protests against widespread failures of police accountability is cynicism of the worst variety,” said Corey Stoughton, Attorney-in-Charge of the Special Litigation Unit with the Criminal Defense Practice at The Legal Aid Society. “Advocates fought long and hard for the transparency mandates of the Know Your Rights Act. In these troubled times, what we need a renewed commitment to further reform, not flagrant disregard by the NYPD for the reforms already codified into law.”

While NYPD officers are permitted to wear “mourning bans” across their shields, they must do so in a manner that leaves their shield number or rank designation visible, according to the NYPD’s own Patrol Guide. Moreover, the city’s Right to Know Act, which went into effect in October 2018, requires that police officers provide their “name, rank, command, and shield number to civilians at the beginning of certain interactions,” and carry business cards with them that contain this information. Failure to adhere to these requirements is a violation of city law.

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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. Follow LDF on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook.

The Legal Aid Society exists for one simple yet powerful reason: to ensure that New Yorkers are not denied their right to equal justice because of poverty. For over 140 years, we have protected, defended, and advocated for those who have struggled in silence for far too long. Every day, in every borough, The Legal Aid Society changes the lives of our clients and helps improve our communities.

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