

NAACP NEWS

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AS BELL CONVICTION IS LIFTED, NAACP REMAINS COMMITTED TO JUSTICE IN JENA

NAACP leaders say today's decision by Louisiana's Third Circuit Court of Appeals in Lake Charles is a good start toward correcting the excessive prosecution of six African American students who were originally charged with an array of offenses including second degree murder.

The state appeals court tossed out the aggravated battery conviction of Mychal Bell, stating that he should not have been tried and convicted as an adult for his alleged role in last year's fight with a white high school classmate in Jena, La.

"The earnest work and passionate pleas of Bells' lawyers and many individuals across the nation were fortunately heard by the court and helped them come to a proper decision," said NAACP Interim President Dennis Courtland Hayes. "The Bell family can now feel temporary relief from the immediate pressures of this on-going process. But the struggle is not over. The NAACP remains committed to the defense of the young men to ensure proper treatment by the court system and protection of their rights under law."

The NAACP gathered a team of pro bono attorneys to assist in Bell's appeal.

To address the broader issues of eradicating racial disparities in the American criminal justice system and public schools, the NAACP will host a town hall meeting titled "Restoring the Human Right to Education: Abolishing the School to Prison Pipeline" at the Holiday Inn Conference Center in Alexandria, La. at 7 p.m. Sept. 20, as part of the Louisiana State Conference of NAACP Branches' 65th annual convention.

"I want to thank NAACP units and others from across the country that are assisting in the effort to extract justice from the injustice in Jena," said Louisiana NAACP State Conference President Dr. Ernest Johnson.

NAACP officials will still present petitions to Louisiana Gov. Kathleen B. Blanco at Noon on Sept. 19 at the State Capitol. The more than 60,000 signatures are a symbol of those concerned with the unequal treatment of the defendants and the disturbing climate that led to an escalation of racial tensions in the southern town.

Demonstration activity updates and information on contributing to the Jena 6 Legal Defense Fund can be found online at www.naacp.org or by calling toll free (888) 362-8683.

Founded in 1909, the NAACP is the nation's oldest and largest civil rights organization. Its members throughout the United States and the world are the premier advocates for civil rights in their communities, conducting voter mobilization and monitoring equal opportunity in the public and private sectors.

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