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LDF Urges the New York State Assembly to Repeal the Hecht-Calandra Act and Implement a New Specialized High School Admissions Plan

Today, NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF) Senior Deputy Director of Litigation [Jin Hee Lee](#) will provide [testimony](#) at a New York State Assembly hearing on proposed measures to make the admissions process for New York City's Specialized High Schools more equitable for qualified students of color. In her testimony, Ms. Lee will call on the State Assembly to repeal the Hecht-Calandra Act and put in place a new plan to address the stark racial disparities in the City's most prestigious public high schools.

The Hecht-Calandra Act mandates that three of the eight Specialized High Schools solely rely on the Specialized High School Admissions Test (SHSAT) to determine which students will be admitted. All of the other Specialized High Schools, except the Fiorello H. LaGuardia High School of Music & Art and Performing Arts, maintain the same admissions policy. However, as Ms. Lee's testimony mentions, single-test admissions are an arbitrary, inaccurate, and unjust measure of a student's abilities. Instead, LDF supports recent proposals to admit to the Specialized High Schools the top five to seven percent of students in eighth grade classes across the entire City.

"The inequities with the Specialized High Schools do not affect only Black and Latinx students. Many Asian Pacific American (APA) ethnicities, nationalities, and subgroups have also been shut out of the Specialized High Schools, although we do not know the precise extent of this problem because the City has not shared disaggregated data," Ms. Lee notes in her testimony. "The exclusion of so many bright and talented Black, Latinx, and underrepresented APA students perpetuates a false narrative about their intelligence and promise and ignores the challenging circumstances in elementary and middle school that were overcome to earn their academic achievements. Indeed, the very students disadvantaged by the SHSAT are often the same ones who face significant barriers to educational opportunity and would greatly benefit from a Specialized High School education."

LDF has long advocated for the need to address the lack of diversity at New York City's Specialized High Schools, and [first called for a change](#) in the State law that governs admissions in a 2012 federal civil rights complaint filed with the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights. That complaint – filed along with LatinoJustice and the Center for Law and Social Justice at Medgar Evers College – alleges that, in addition to being bad education policy, the single-test admissions policy has an unlawful racially disparate impact.

More recently, LDF, along with LatinoJustice, the ACLU, and the New York Civil Liberties Union, [moved to intervene](#) on behalf of students, parents, and community organizations in a federal

lawsuit in order to defend a legal challenge to the recent expansion of the Discovery Program. The request asks the Court to allow these families and organizations to defend New York City's modest efforts to increase access to the Specialized High Schools for disadvantaged students, and to begin to redress the systemic racial exclusion caused by the deeply flawed, test-only admissions policy.

Read LDF's testimony [here](#).

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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 and 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.

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