

Law Firms Team With ACLU To Fight Racism In La. Policing

By **Xiumei Dong**

Law360 (June 25, 2020, 4:03 PM EDT) -- Eighteen law firms have signed up to join forces with the American Civil Liberties Union of Louisiana in a campaign to combat racist policing practices in a state with one of the highest imprisonment rates in the country.

The initiative announced Wednesday, called "Justice Lab: Putting Racist Practices in Policing on Trial," will bring together resources from law firms, law schools and local organizations to take on racially motivated stops and seizures that occurred within the state in the past nine months.

According to the ACLU, participating law firms will lead challenges to alleged unconstitutional stops and seizures under the Fourth and 14th Amendments and any other applicable laws. The initiative seeks to bring up to 1,000 cases in Louisiana.

Louisiana has the highest incarceration rate of any U.S. state, according to the U.S. Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Statistics. For 2017, Louisiana's incarceration rate was 722 per 100,000 residents, and for 2018, it was 695 per 100,000.

The ACLU of Louisiana hopes to recruit at least 100 for-profit law firms to participate in the project. To date, 18 firms have joined, including Akerman LLP, Barrasso Usdin Kupperman Freeman & Sarver LLC, Boies Schiller Flexner LLP, Cohen & Gresser LLP, Cooley LLP, Covington & Burling LLP, Durie Tangri LLP, Foley Hoag LLP and Holwell Shuster & Goldberg LLP.

The team also includes King & Spalding LLP, Kuchler Polk Weiner LLC, Morgan Lewis & Bockius LLP, Orrick Herrington & Sutcliffe LLP, Reid Collins & Tsai LLP, Simpson Thacher & Bartlett LLP, Steptoe & Johnson LLP, Susman Godfrey LLP and Venable LLP, according to a press release.

The collaboration comes as law firms seek to express support for racial justice as demonstrations continue to sweep the nation in response to the police killing of George Floyd and other Black Americans.

"As a law firm, we are participants in the system of justice in this country," Durie Tangri's founding partner Daralyn Durie said in a statement.

"All too often, for Black and Brown communities, that system is one of injustice. Condemning racism is the easy part. It is also not enough. We must act," Durie added. "The murders of Breonna Taylor, George

Floyd, Rayshard Brooks, and too many others did not occur in a vacuum. They grew from, and were fed by, countless unconstitutional stops, seizures, and uses of excessive force. We must attack this epidemic at its root."

Kenneth Polite, a Morgan Lewis partner and former U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Louisiana, said that the unified effort through Justice Lab "will help Louisiana reshape policing practices."

"Our partnership will serve as one of the ways we will bring change to a system that is in such desperate need, and in a state I personally care deeply about, with the goal of taking best practices learned from this initiative and applying them nationwide," Polite said in a statement. "We at Morgan Lewis will put our full strength behind this fight for racial equality and justice."

Law firms are also joining forces on other projects to promote racial justice.

Also on Wednesday, more than 125 law firms announced that they had signed on to participate in the new Law Firm Antiracism Alliance, which intends to combat racism in the legal industry and in government.

As outlined in the alliance's charter, the group seeks to leverage the resources of the private bar to amplify the voices of communities and individuals oppressed by racism. To accomplish those goals, the group is partnering with the Racial Justice Institute and Racial Justice Network at the Shriver Center on Poverty Law and other legal services organizations.

--Additional reporting by Dorothy Atkins. Editing by Alanna Weissman.