

NAACP NEWS

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Francys Johnson, President
Georgia NAACP

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PRESS RELEASE

Contact: Constance Wallace
E: communications@naacpga.org
P: (404) 577-8977



PRESS RELEASE

Georgia NAACP Investigating the Fine Collection Practices of the City of LaGrange *Policy Disproportionately Impacts Poor Citizens*

The Georgia NAACP along with a coalition of other civil and human rights organizations including the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU of Georgia) and the Southern Center for Human Rights are investigating the fine collection practices of the City of LaGrange. "We've received multiple complaints that have been filed with our office from citizens who have been evicted, fired from employment, and even been threatened to have their children removed from their custody by Child Welfare workers because they could not get essential utilities in their name due to an unpaid criminal fine attached to their accounts" says Francys Johnson, Stateboro Attorney and President of the Georgia NAACP.

"Nothing will change until we change it" said Ernest Ward, Troup County Branch President. Ward stressed that citizens should not be afraid to come forward. "We are not looking to make the City look bad. We are seeking to move LaGrange forward and will be asking simple questions:

- Has the city of LaGrange ever added your court fines or probation fees to your light bill?
- Has the city of LaGrange ever added the court fines or probation fees of a friend or family member to your utility bill?
- Have you ever had your water, gas, and/or heat disconnected by the city of LaGrange because you couldn't pay yours or someone else's court fines or probation fees?
- Are you now unable to get the lights on in your name because you still owe the city of LaGrange for court fines or probation fees?

"If you said YES to any of these questions, the NAACP of Georgia invites you to a very important public hearing. We want to hear from you as, together, we say NO to the city of LaGrange's abusive practice", said Ward.

On February 25, 2016 at 6:00 pm at the Church of the King, 911 Murphy Avenue, LaGrange, Georgia 30240, the Georgia NAACP Troup County Branch will hold a public meeting to address

100 Edgewood Avenue NE, Suite 1610, Atlanta, Georgia 30303

Citizen's concerns and to take testimony about how the collection practices of the City of LaGrange are impacting the quality of life. "This is not a black or white issue for the NAACP, this is a Red, White and Blue issue. The collection of fines to operate this city was at the heart of what was wrong in Ferguson because it provided an economic incentive to promote a culture of policing in certain neighborhoods that became abusive. We are concerned that a disproportionate share of the budget of LaGrange is supported by those who can least afford it" said Johnson.

Following the Public Hearing, the Georgia NAACP and other coalition members plan to meet with city officials and discuss solutions that may alleviate any abusive practices. "We are seeking to be partners in building a more just society. That work is best done in collaboration with our elected and appointed leaders. If we find doors that are open and public servants willing to move forward; then good. If not, we will not hesitate to redress our concerns in a court of law" said Johnson.

For more information, please contact Ernest Ward at (706) 302-0345.

For more information about the work of the Georgia NAACP, please visit our website at www.naacpga.org.

Founded in 1909, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) is the nation's oldest and largest civil rights organization. The Georgia NAACP has had an unbroken presence in Georgia since 1917. The Georgia NAACP maintains a network of branches throughout Georgia, from cities to small rural counties. The Georgia NAACP has been the most effective and consistent advocates for civil and human rights in Georgia. The NAACP's half-million adult and youth 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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