

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Lawyering while black: after appearing in court,
attorney is detained and questioned by officer**

An African-American legal aid attorney who obtained an expungement for his absent client in the Harford County District Court was detained by an officer from the Harford County Sheriff's Office who suspected that the lawyer was in fact the client – based on no evidence other than that they both are black. Today, lawyers for that attorney have filed a complaint with the Harford County Sheriff's Office requesting an investigation.

On March 6, 2019, Rashad James, an attorney for Maryland Legal Aid, appeared in Harford County District Court for an expungement hearing on behalf of a client who was not present. Both Mr. James and the client are black. Harford County is 81% white. After the hearing, an officer from the Harford County Sheriff's Office detained and questioned Mr. James on suspicion that Mr. James was his client impersonating an attorney.

During the hearing, Mr. James stated on the record that he was appearing as counsel on behalf of the client. The judge acknowledged Mr. James as the client's attorney and granted the expungement petition. As Mr. James was leaving the courtroom, the officer stopped him. The officer had been present in the courtroom during the hearing, yet addressed Mr. James as the client. Mr. James told the officer that he was the attorney, not the client. The officer then asked Mr. James to provide identification, and Mr. James produced his driver's license. Unwilling to accept this clear evidence of Mr. James' identity, the officer escorted him to an interview room. After approximately ten minutes of questioning and phone calls, the officer finally allowed Mr. James to leave.

“If Mr. James were white, the officer would not have doubted that Mr. James was an attorney, would not have questioned his identity, and certainly would not have detained Mr. James after seeing his driver's license,” said Andrew D. Freeman of Brown, Goldstein & Levy, an attorney for Mr. James, “There is no plausible explanation other than racial bias.”

For more information, media are invited to attend a press conference at Brown, Goldstein & Levy, LLP, 120 East Baltimore Street, Suite 1700, Baltimore, MD 21202 on Tuesday, March 26, 2019 at 4:00 p.m.