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POST OFFICE BOX 44003
BATON ROUGE, LOUISIANA 70804
(225) 342-7342
FAX: (225) 342-0364
email: caucusb@legis.state.la.us
www.llbc.louisiana.gov

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

Contact: State Representative Juan LaFonta
Chair, LLBC
Phone: (504) 282-0265
Fax: (504) 282-0821

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BLACK CAUCUS DEMANDS JUSTICE IN "JENA 6" CASE

The case of six high school students charged in the alleged beating of a white student only illustrates how the remnants of a racist society reappear when it is politically expedient, members of the Louisiana Legislative Black Caucus said in calling for a new trial for Mychal Bell.

Bell is among six African American students charged with attempted murder after a schoolyard fight at Jena High School last December. The "victim" in the case was released from the hospital in a matter of hours and attended a social function at the school later that night, yet Bell has been convicted of aggravated second-degree battery and conspiracy- charges that could land him in jail for 22 years.

The fight last December apparently stemmed from an incident earlier in the year when three white students hung nooses on a campus tree "reserved" for white students. The perpetrators of this clear case of terrorizing and hate crimes were suspended from school for only three days.

"When I went to law school, we were taught that second-degree battery requires the use of a weapon and conspiracy requires planning," said LLBC Chairman Rep. Juan LaFonta. "There is no just cause for Mr. Bell to have been even tried on these charges, let alone convicted. Now the other defendants await trial on the same charges. There can be no happy ending to this, but there can be justice."

-More-

ADD ONE: Black Caucus Demands Justice in "Jena 6" Case

LaFonta said the Black Caucus is calling on Gov. Kathleen Blanco and Attorney General Charles Foti to intervene in this case and conduct a thorough investigation.

"At a time when there is so much chatter about "Louisiana's reputation," there can be nothing more damaging than the legalized lynching of Mychal Bell and his classmates," LaFonta said. "There must be justice and it cannot wait."

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