

Release 1200.6

January 3, 1965

TO: ALL MEDIA, FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

RE: MFDP PLANS FOR TAKING OF EVIDENCE ON NEGRO DISENFRANCHISEMENT IN MISSISSIPPI

FROM: Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party
 1353 "U" Street, N.W.,
 Washington, D. C.
 Telephone 332-7732

The Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, today made public plans for coordinating the efforts of more than 100 lawyers and assistants who will gather evidence of intimidation, harrassment, and other voting denials of prospective Negro voters in Mississippi. The depositions to be taken by these legal volunteers from January 20 to February 12 will be submitted to the House of Representatives in support of challenges to the seating of all five of Mississippi's congressmen-elect in the 89th Congress on the grounds that 95% of Mississippi's Negro population of voting age has been deliberately, unlawfully and systematically excluded from participation in all elections in the state. This denial has been accomplished through violence, harrassment, murder, economic reprisals, fraud, a comprehensive mass of unconstitutional state legislation, and other means that have seemed necessary or appropriate to the State of Mississippi to accomplish its purposes. Lawrence Guyot, chairman of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party said that: "from the response that we have been getting to our appeals for lawyers, we can say that, as a minimum, there will be more than 100 lawyers, numerous legal assistants, and a large number of stenographers going into the state to take depositions on Negro voter intimidation, harrassment, violence, and the other forms of wholesale disenfranchisement of almost the state's entire Negro population."

Guyot said that the Party was engaged in extensive preparation for gathering evidence to present to the House of Representatives in reply to the claim and demand filed by the Mississippi congressmen-elect in their answers stating that they had no "personal knowledge as to the truth or falsity" of "systematic and deliberate disfranchisement and exclusion of Negroes from the electoral process in Mississippi." The Mississippi members elect demanded strict proof of this "systematic and deliberate disenfranchisement", Guyot declared, and it is this proof the Party is now preparing to gather.

The MFDP announced that the first wave of notices and subpoenas to persons from whom evidence will be taken in Mississippi would be served shortly.

Plans were also announced about the holding of legal seminars and briefing sessions in four major cities. These sessions for the lawyers going into Mississippi will take place on the west coast in Los Angeles and San Francisco, in the east in New York City, and in the South in New Orleans during the week of January 9 - 15. "The first teams of lawyers will enter the state on about January 20th," Guyot said. "Arrangements are already being made in the various Mississippi congressional districts to set up the machinery for the taking of evidence. What we will be doing is collecting the first complete body of formal, sworn evidence which will tell to the Congress and the nation the true facts about the near-total exclusion of Negroes from the ballot in Mississippi."

It was also announced that the MFDP has requested the assistance of the many major legal defense organizations involved in the Mississippi Summer Project during the summer of 1964.

The taking of testimony and of other evidence will take place under authority deriving from Title 2, U. S. Code 201, under which the MFDP challenges now pending before the House have been filed. The MFDP period for taking evidence will run until February 12, or 40 days after the filing of replies to the challenge by the Mississippi congressmen-elect. They filed answers on January 2, 1965.

Based on a strong and substantial prima facie case already made in its Notice of Contest, the MFDP is asking the House not to prejudge the case by seating the congressmen-elect on Monday, January 4, 1965, before a full presentation of the complete and comprehensive evidence has been presented.