

NAACP NEWS

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PRESS RELEASE

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PRESS RELEASE

GEORGIA NAACP FILES VOTING RIGHTS FEDERAL LAWSUIT AGAINST GWINNETT COUNTY

Most Racially Diverse County in the Southeastern United States has No Minority Representation by Design

ATLANTA, GEORGIA Earlier this morning, the Georgia NAACP, GALEO (Georgia Association of Latino Elected Officials) and Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law (Lawyers' Committee) filed a federal lawsuit in the Northern District Court of Georgia alleging a violation of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 by Gwinnett County.

"This is a part of our ongoing post-Shelby election administration monitoring across Georgia," said Francys Johnson, Statesboro civil rights attorney and Georgia NAACP state president.

"This case is illustrative of the fact that freedom is a constant struggle. In Georgia's rural town and counties to large cities, there has been a steady chipping away of the gains achieved under the Voting Rights Act and the National Voter Registration Act and the redistricting process has been a major tool of retrogression. The NAACP will mortgage every asset we have to defend the unfettered access to the ballot. It was paid for with the blood, sweat and tears of our ancestors – it's sacred."

The complaint, filed in the United States District Court for the Northern District of Georgia, alleges that the current district maps for the Gwinnett County Board of Commissioners and Board of Education violate Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act by diluting the voting strength of minority voters, and coupled with a pattern of racially polarized voting, deprive African American, Latino and Asian American voters of a fair opportunity to elect candidates of their choice.

"Gwinnett County is the most racially diverse county in the Southeastern United States, with African American, Latino and Asian American voters comprising approximately 43% of the voting age population, yet no minority candidate has ever won election to the County Board of Commissioners or Board of Education," said Kristen Clarke, president and executive director of the Lawyers' Committee. "We believe that the lack of diversity on these Boards is attributable to the current district maps which dilute minority voting strength by packing and fragmenting the minority population, combined with a pattern of racially polarized voting in which White voters typically vote as a bloc to prevent minority preferred candidates from winning elections. This lawsuit seeks to level the playing field to give minority voters a fair opportunity to elect candidates of their choice, said Clarke."

"The decisions of these Boards impact the day-to-day lives of Gwinnett County residents in a myriad of ways, yet because of the packing and splitting of minority voters in the current district plans, minority candidates have been repeatedly defeated in Gwinnett County elections," said Jerry Gonzales, GALEO Executive Director. "District lines must be fairly drawn for minority communities to elect the representatives of their choice, to engage meaningfully with decision makers, and to make sure that their needs are addressed."

The current Board of Education district map packs approximately 74.4% of the African American, Latino, and Asian American voters into District 5 and splits the balance of the minority population across the other four districts where African Americans, Latinos and Asian Americans do not constitute a majority of the population. The complaint alleges that the Board of Education districts should be re-drawn to include a second majority-minority district so that minority voters have a fair opportunity to elect candidates of their choice to the Gwinnett County Board of Education.

Similarly, the current Board of Commissioners' districting plan unnecessarily divides Black, Latino, and Asian American voters between four single-member districts, preventing them from combining to form a majority in any district. The complaint alleges that two majority-minority Board of Commissioners districts should be drawn to give African American, Latino and Asian American the ability to elect candidates of their choice.

"This case exemplifies the need to safeguard access to the ballot to ensure that the right to vote is not impeded by the redistricting process," said Francys Johnson, Georgia NAACP state president. "When district lines have been drawn to marginalize minority voters, a lawsuit brought under Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act is sometimes the only way minority voters can achieve parity with White voters and have the ability to elect candidates who are responsive to their needs and concerns."

The Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law (Lawyers' Committee), along with the Washington, D.C. office of Crowell and Mooring LLP and Atlanta based attorney, Brian Sutherland, Esq., are acting as pro bono counsel.

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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