Eleventh Circuit Reverses District Court Decision, Preventing Gardendale Secession from Alabama School District

The Eleventh Circuit Court of Appeals denied Gardendale, Alabama’s motion to separate itself from the Jefferson County public school system today, in the appeal of an April 2017 ruling that the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. litigated. In Stout v. Jefferson, a district court had allowed the predominantly-white city of Gardendale, Alabama to partially secede from the more racially diverse Jefferson County school system, despite the fact that the court found that the action was motivated by intentional racial discrimination. Today, the Eleventh Circuit held that the district court was wrong to permit Gardendale to separate and denied Gardendale’s motion to secede.

LDF’s Director of Litigation Sam Spital issued the following statement:

“We have long maintained that Gardendale’s attempt to form its own school district was specifically designed to exclude Black schoolchildren. Ultimately, this separation would have created a district significantly whiter than the county as a whole, forcing some students to attend more racially segregated schools. Today’s ruling was the only logical conclusion following a district court’s direct acknowledgment that racial discrimination was a motivating factor in the City’s plans to secede. We commend the federal appeals court for its decision that combats a disturbing re-segregation trend, seen not just in Gardendale, but in cities across the country. We must continue to thwart re-segregation efforts so that students can benefit from co-existing and learning together. We will continue doing everything in our power to ensure that state and local governments facilitate the integration of all children.”

LDF’s partners in this case are local counsel and retired federal judge, the Honorable U.W. Clemon. For background, please visit our case page.
Founded in 1940, the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF) is the nation’s first civil and human rights law organization and has been completely separate from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) since 1957—although LDF was originally founded by the NAACP and shares its commitment to equal rights. LDF’s Thurgood Marshall Institute is a multi-disciplinary and collaborative hub within LDF that launches targeted campaigns and undertakes innovative research to shape the civil rights narrative. In media attributions, please refer to us as the NAACP Legal Defense Fund or LDF.