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### **Court Decision in Louisiana Voting Rights Case Changes the Course of History for Black Voters for the Better**

Yesterday, a federal district court ruled in favor of the Terrebonne Parish NAACP and four Black voters, represented by the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund (LDF), the law firm of Cozen O'Connor, and longtime Louisiana civil rights attorney, Ronald L. Wilson, in an important voting rights case.

Following an eight-day bench trial earlier this year, the court determined that Louisiana's use of at-large voting for electing five members to the 32nd Judicial District Court (32nd JDC), the state court encompassing Terrebonne Parish, Louisiana, violated the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and the U.S. Constitution. This decision paves the way for an end to a nearly 50-year old discriminatory voting practice and for Black voters to have the equal opportunity—for the first time since that state court was created in 1968—to elect their preferred judicial candidates.

In a detailed and meticulous 91-page-ruling, the federal district court “found a strong case of vote dilution.” The court observed that “no [B]lack candidate who has faced opposition in Terrebonne has been elected to an at-large position, and [B]lack candidates have received incredibly minimal support from white voters, a pattern which has been consistent over the course of more than twenty years.” Further, the court determined that “a motivating purpose in maintaining the at-large electoral scheme for the 32nd JDC was to limit the opportunity of [B]lack individuals to participate meaningfully and effectively in the political process to elect judges of their choice.” The court noted “the persistent advocacy of the [B]lack community [for a majority-Black single-member district], and the equally persistent opposition to this advocacy which was partially based on justifications that do not seem completely legitimate.”

Plaintiffs filed the lawsuit to force the creation of a majority-Black single-member district that will provide them and other Black voters in Terrebonne with a chance to have a say-so as to who serves them on the 32nd JDC. Many other state courts in Louisiana's judicial system, including its highest court,

the Louisiana Supreme Court, use district-based voting like the remedy Plaintiffs seek in this case. Indeed, the court recognized in its ruling that outside of New Orleans, a majority-Black city, “a majority of the JDC judges elected in Louisiana are elected by subdistrict.” The court noted that in 1996, a task force created by the Louisiana Supreme Court had found that district-based voting was “the only feasible means of ensuring diversity” in the state court system.

“Having a voice in the political process is a central tenet of our democracy,” said LDF Senior Counsel [Leah Aden](#), lead counsel in this case. “This important decision correctly recognizes the intentionally discriminatory nature of the at-large voting scheme for the 32nd JDC in Terrebonne and ensures that every vote matters.”

“For decades, Black voters and others have pressed to change the voting method for the 32nd JDC in Terrebonne,” said Ronald Wilson. “Black voters looked to federal court to do what the Louisiana Legislature failed to do on six different occasions between 1997 and 2011 when it did not support proposals that would provide Black voters in Terrebonne with fair electoral opportunity.”

“The most glaring example of how at-large voting has enshrined discrimination in Terrebonne is the fact that this voting method enabled a white judge to be reelected without opposition to the 32nd JDC in 2008 after the Louisiana Supreme Court suspended him in 2004 for wearing blackface, an orange prison jumpsuit, and handcuffs as a Halloween costume,” said Michael de Leeuw of Cozen O’Connor.

“Today’s victory is an example of what can be accomplished when Black communities in partnership with civil rights groups like LDF and other advocates defend our country’s core democratic values,” said [Victorien Wu](#), Assistant Counsel at LDF. “On behalf of Black communities, LDF will continue to challenge voting practices that serve to weaken, discourage, or deny people of their fundamental right to vote.”

Following this liability determination, plaintiffs will request that the court adopt a full and complete remedy to the vote dilution that Black voters have endured in elections for the 32nd JDC.

Read the full [ruling](#).

To learn more about this case, visit our [case page](#).

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*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.*