



For Immediate Release
Tuesday, May 23, 2023

LDF Media
media@naacpldf.org

Black Arkansas Voters Sue Over Racially Gerrymandered Congressional Map

Today, the Legal Defense Fund (LDF), O'Melveny & Myers LLP, and longtime Arkansas civil rights attorney, Arkie Byrd, filed a [federal lawsuit](#) on behalf of the Christian Ministerial Alliance, and individual voters, Patricia Brewer, Carolyn Briggs, Lynette Brown, and Mable Bynum, challenging Arkansas's 2021 congressional redistricting. Plaintiffs allege that the redistricting violates the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments of the U.S. Constitution by intentionally separating Black voters – specifically those residing in the southeastern area of Pulaski County, which is home to the largest Black population in Arkansas – among three districts to thwart their political power.

“Arkansas’s congressional map is a backlash against the emerging power of Black voters in Little Rock in Pulaski County,” said LDF Deputy Director of Litigation Leah Aden. “In recent years, candidates preferred by Black voters in Pulaski County have made great strides to force competitive elections at the congressional level and even to elect Little Rock’s first Black mayor and Pulaski County’s first Black sheriff and county clerk. With these huge strides for fair representation, Arkansas’ General Assembly responded by cracking Pulaski County into three different congressional districts, effectively blocking such strides from occurring in that area of the state again. Voters in Arkansas must not be silenced for the next decade by a racially gerrymandered congressional map.”

Daniel Bookin, an attorney with O'Melveny & Myers, stated, “The Arkansas Legislature intentionally removed Black voters from the Second Congressional District and replaced them with white voters to dilute the power of Black voters and ensure Arkansas remains the only former confederate state to never elect a Black person to Congress.”

Plaintiffs released the following joint statement:

“For too long, Black communities in Arkansas have been disproportionately affected by police brutality, educational inequality, lack of health care, environmental harms, and many other issues that could be addressed by representatives who respond to our concerns. Instead, the Arkansas legislature dispersed Black voters into three congressional districts, separating us and those who support us to ensure we are unable to vote collectively in one congressional district anchored in Pulaski County. Congressional candidates now don't have to compete for our votes or even bother to campaign in our communities, let alone remedy harms occurring in our

communities. Arkansas's history is deeply saturated with racism, and it is shameful the general assembly has chosen to continue it with its congressional line-drawing rather than respect its own redistricting rules which would provide the opportunity for us to have a seat at the table. We will continue fighting back against those who wish to silence us through this gerrymandering until our constitutional rights are won.”

“It’s apparent that the General Assembly targeted Black voters in southeast Pulaski to be divided among three congressional districts,” said Arkie Byrd, longstanding LDF cooperating attorney. “Had the general assembly followed their own redistricting criteria, the map would never cut Pulaski County into three districts. This congressional line-drawing sends the message to Black Arkansans that they cannot vote with their neighbors because of their race and that is unconstitutional.”

The lawsuit cites Arkansas’s long, ongoing, and well-documented history of discriminating against Black voters, as well as the growing Black electoral impact over the previous decade. The redistricting process directly affects the allocation of crucial resources such as school funding, healthcare access, and affordable housing. Pulaski County played a historic role in desegregating U.S. schools when, after the Supreme Court’s historic ruling *Brown v. Board of Education*, nine Black students were prevented by Governor Orval Faubus and the Arkansas National Guard from entering Little Rock Central High School. Today, lawsuits in federal and state courts are ongoing, challenging Arkansas’ electoral methods for its appellate and highest supreme courts, as well as its state legislative maps as racially discriminatory.

Read the lawsuit challenging Arkansas’s congressional map [here](#).

###

Founded in 1940, the Legal Defense Fund (LDF) is the nation’s first civil rights law organization. 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 Legal Defense Fund or LDF. Please note that LDF 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.