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### **LDF Begins Trial to Strike Down Racially Discriminatory Voting Maps in DeSoto County, Mississippi**

Trial began today in *Harris v. DeSoto County* in federal court in the Northern District of Mississippi, where the Legal Defense Fund (LDF) is challenging a racially discriminatory electoral map in DeSoto County.

LDF, along with the Election Law Clinic at Harvard Law School, the ACLU of Mississippi, and voting rights attorney Amir Badat, [filed the lawsuit](#) in September 2024. The groups represent Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., DeSoto County NAACP and two individual DeSoto County residents. The lawsuit asserts that the electoral map adopted by the DeSoto County Board of Supervisors during the 2022 redistricting process violates Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act by diluting the voting power of Black DeSoto County residents and denying them an equal opportunity to elect representatives of their choice to office.

The 2022 map diluted Black voting power in DeSoto County by manipulating the community population into five majority-white districts, splitting majority-black areas like the city of Horn Lake into pieces. Not a single Black person has been elected in one of those districts in the past 20 years, despite the fact the Black population of DeSoto County has grown from less than 12% to over 36% since the 2000 Census.

The denial of full and equal voting rights caused irreparable harm to Black DeSoto citizens, who have suffered from wide disparities between white DeSoto County residents' county employment rates, school resource distribution, and health care outcomes. DeSoto is now one of only 11 counties in Mississippi without a Black supervisor, leaving its Black residents with zero representation in county government.

“Democracy is at stake here in Mississippi,” said **Brenda Wright, LDF Special Litigation and Policy Counsel**. “The people of DeSoto County deserve a nondiscriminatory map and redistricting process. This should be the bare minimum standard for the county. These elections will never be truly free and fair if Black voters are continuously denied the opportunity to make positive changes to their home through political participation.”

“DeSoto County’s Black community has been fighting for fair representation for years,” said **Daniel Hessel, Attorney at the Election Law Clinic at Harvard Law School**. “The maps the Board of Supervisors passed over the objections of Black residents cut through the heart of DeSoto County’s growing Black population. We look forward to representing them as they bring this fight to court.”

“Having zero Black preferred candidates elected to the 25 county offices when DeSoto County is over one-third Black is not only unfair, it is a violation of federal law,” said **Joshua Tom, Legal Director at the ACLU of Mississippi**. “All DeSoto County voters have a right to fair representation in the County government. Our lawsuit seeks to enforce that right.”

“This case is about power, voice, and fairness,” said **Voting Rights Attorney Amir Badat**. “Black residents showed up, organized, and asked for fair representation during the redistricting process, but their calls were ignored. The evidence presented at trial will show that DeSoto County’s district lines deny Black residents the representation they deserve under the law.”

“For more than a century, Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated has been a force for defending democratic representation,” said **Cheryl W. Turner, International President, Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.** “We joined this case because the DeSoto County redistricting plan fractures Black communities and denies Black residents a fair and meaningful opportunity to participate in local democracy. When electoral maps are drawn to dilute political power and predetermine outcomes, the result is exclusion — not representation. Delta will continue to stand, organize, and act to protect fair maps, equal representation, and accountable governance.”

“We believe the reason Mississippi ranks at or near the bottom in categories such as education, health care, and economics, while maintaining high poverty and death rates, is due to ‘Jim Crow’ leadership,” said **Robert Tipton Jr., President of the NAACP DeSoto County Branch**. “We recognize that ‘Jim Crow’ is not a person, but a deeply racist legacy. It is time to move toward what is right and provide DeSoto County an opportunity to improve the entire state. We believe the only way to achieve this is through diverse representation in our county seats.”

The trial will likely proceed for the next two weeks. [To learn more about the case, visit here.](#)

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*Founded in 1940, the [Legal Defense Fund \(LDF\)](#) is the nation’s first civil rights legal organization. LDF has been completely separate from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) since 1957, though it was founded under the leadership of Thurgood Marshall while he was at the NAACP. LDF’s Thurgood Marshall Institute (TMI) is a division of LDF that undertakes innovative research and houses*

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