

# Federal Court Blocks South Carolina Witness Requirement That Would Put Voters at Risk During COVID-19 Pandemic

ACLU and LDF Lawsuit Challenged the Provision

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**CONTACT:**

Inga Sarda-Sorensen, ACLU National, [347-514-3984](tel:347-514-3984), [isarda-sorensen@aclu.org](mailto:isarda-sorensen@aclu.org)  
Ali Titus, ACLU of South Carolina, [803-318-2500](tel:803-318-2500), [atitus@aclusc.org](mailto:atitus@aclusc.org)  
Phoebe Plagens, NAACP LDF, [212-965-2235](tel:212-965-2235), [pplagens@naacpldf.org](mailto:pplagens@naacpldf.org)

COLUMBIA, S.C. — A federal court today blocked a South Carolina requirement that forced people who vote absentee to obtain a witness signature. The ruling, which applies to the June primary, makes it safer for South Carolinians to vote during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The American Civil Liberties Union, ACLU of South Carolina, and NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund successfully challenged the requirement, which if allowed to stay in effect could have disenfranchised tens of thousands of eligible voters who could not risk contact with other individuals to vote in person or obtain a witness signature on their absentee ballot.

The following reactions are from:

**Adriel Cepeda Derieux, a staff attorney with the ACLU’s Voting Rights Project:** “The court recognized the gravity of forcing voters to needlessly risk their health to obtain a witness signature. This ruling means voters in South Carolina can safely cast a ballot in the June primary elections in this time of COVID-19. It is a huge victory.”

**Susan Dunn, legal director of the ACLU of South Carolina:** “This ruling is a critical victory for our democracy and all voters in South Carolina. The elimination of the witness requirement protects not only those who are most vulnerable to the pandemic, it also ensures that no one will have to risk exposure to COVID-19 in order to exercise their fundamental right to vote in the primary elections.”

**Deuel Ross, senior counsel at LDF:** “Today’s decision represents an enormous victory for our clients and all South Carolinians. The temporary suspension of the witness signature requirement for absentee ballots removes a needless barrier that required people to violate social distancing protocols to vote. Now, everyone can vote in the June elections without the fear of endangering their health. This win is especially important for black voters, who are more likely to be infected by COVID-19 and more likely to die from it than other South Carolinians. The court’s decision protects the safety and well-being of those voters who are most at risk from COVID-19.”

The lawsuit, *Thomas v. Andino*, was filed in U.S. District Court in Columbia, S.C.

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