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Black Voters Intervene in Lawsuit to Defend Majority-Black Districts in Louisiana

BATON ROUGE, La. — Black voters and civil rights groups moved to **intervene** in a new lawsuit late yesterday that would invalidate the congressional redistricting plan enacted just weeks ago. The map was drawn in response to a long-running Voting Rights Act case in which two federal courts ruled Louisiana must create a second majority-Black district. The voters and groups who intervened in the new lawsuit, *Callais v. Landry*, were the plaintiffs in the earlier Voting Rights Act litigation.

In 2022, plaintiffs Power Coalition for Equity and Justice, the Louisiana State Conference of the NAACP, and individual voters Press Robinson, Edgar Cage, Dorothy Nairne, Edwin René Soulé, Alice Washington, Clee Earnest Lowe, Davante Lewis, Martha Davis, and Ambrose Sims filed a lawsuit under Section 2 of the VRA, *Robinson v. Landry*, claiming the map enacted in 2022 by the Louisiana Legislature, which contained only one Black-majority district out of six, violated the VRA by diluting the voting strength of Black Louisianians who comprise one-third of Louisiana's population. After years of litigation, the federal courts gave the Louisiana Legislature a final opportunity to pass a new map with a second majority-Black district prior to trial. While legislators declined to adopt the map proposed by the *Robinson* plaintiffs due to other political priorities, they passed a map with a second majority-Black district in January, curing the VRA violation. Soon after, a group of litigants who identify themselves as “non-Black voters” filed a new lawsuit claiming the new map was an unconstitutional racial gerrymander. On February 7, 2024, the *Robinson* plaintiffs moved to intervene in that litigation to defend the map and protect the interests of Black voters through continued enforcement of the VRA.

“The *Callais* lawsuit flies directly in the face of rulings by the federal court in Baton Rouge and the Fifth Circuit that a congressional map without two districts in which Black Louisianians can elect candidates of their choice violates the Voting Rights Act,” said Stuart Naifeh, Redistricting Manager at the Legal Defense Fund. “The court should reject out of hand these new plaintiffs’ attempt to distort the law and the legislative record and rob Black voters of their hard-won voice in Louisiana’s congressional delegation.”

“The new map provides opportunities for Black voters that are the direct reflection of years of organizing and the continued strength of the Voting Rights Act,” said Ashley Shelton, President/CEO of Power Coalition for Equity and Justice. “We won’t stop fighting to make sure voters are able to exercise their power and have their voices heard in the coming elections—this year and beyond. It is time that Louisianians across our state can see an end to costly litigation and embrace a future of fair representation.”

“We are undeterred in our ongoing fight for fair maps in Louisiana,” said Michael McClanahan, President of the NAACP Louisiana State Conference. “The new map is the law of the land and the NAACP will continue to educate, organize, and mobilize voters about their right to vote on a fair map.”

“The new *Callais* lawsuit seeks to erase multiple decisions by federal courts indicating that the Voting Rights Act requires two majority-Black congressional districts in Louisiana by simply ignoring the precedent and the record that our clients have spent years fighting to create,” said Megan Keenan, staff attorney with the ACLU’s Voting Rights Project. “We’re intervening to continue our fight to uphold the promise of the Voting Rights Act for Black Louisianians.”

“Black Louisianians’ votes matter,” said Nora Ahmed, ACLU of Louisiana legal director. “We will continue to fight for and protect the new second majority-Black congressional district. Black voters matter, and so do their electoral choices.”

“Louisiana’s Black voters deserve an equal voice in Congress. We are intervening in *Callais* to make sure that is not taken away,” said Alora Thomas-Lundborg, senior counsel at Harvard Election Law Clinic.

The intervening *Robinson* plaintiffs are represented by the Legal Defense Fund, American Civil Liberties Union, ACLU of Louisiana, Harvard Election Law Clinic, Louisiana Justice Institute, Louisiana attorney John Adcock, and Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison LLP.