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Black Voters Sue Jefferson County Commission for Racial Gerrymandering

Today, the Legal Defense Fund (LDF) and Wiggins, Childs, Pantazis, Fisher & Goldfarb filed a [lawsuit](#) on behalf of Cara McClure, Greater Birmingham Ministries (GBM), the Alabama State Conference of the NAACP challenging the Jefferson County Commission districts as unconstitutional racial gerrymanders. The plaintiffs allege that the Commission violated the 14th Amendment of the Constitution by unnecessarily packing Black voters into two super majority-Black commission districts (with over 75% Black populations) and moving Black voters out of other Commission Districts to prevent Black voters from having influence over the elections in the remaining three districts.

“Redistricting plays a critical role in ensuring communities’ needs and interests are properly represented – affecting everything from funding for infrastructure and schools to the availability of healthcare for those in need,” said LDF assistant counsel Kathryn Sadasivan. “Not only did the Commission rush through a process that will determine the county’s districts for the next decade, but they manipulated the districts to prevent Black, Latinx and other voters from realizing their fair share of political power. This is a clear violation of the Constitution.”

"The vision of GBM is one of a participatory, inclusive, and compassionate state and community where power is equitable, transparent and democratically accountable," said GBM Executive Director Scott Douglas. "And so we are taking action to create county commission districts that are equitable representations of the will and aspirations of Black voters and no longer pack or crack their votes in order to minimize their voices or dilute the impact of their voting in Jefferson County."

"For over a decade," said Alabama NAACP President Bernard Simelton, "the Jefferson County Commission has packed Black voters into two Commission districts, ensuring that communities of color have less influence on the Commission than they would have under a fair system. It is shameful that our elected officials refuse to abide by the Constitution and are effectively disenfranchising Black voters to prevent us from having a say in our political discourse. By denying Black voters fair representation, we are denied resources that have a direct effect on our quality of life. We will continue to hold the Commission accountable until this map is fair, and our communities are heard."

“I believe Jefferson County should go back to the drawing board on its redistricting process to ensure a more accurate representation of all communities,” said plaintiff and individual voter Cara McClure, “one that reflects the diversity and needs of Jefferson County.”

The lawsuit cites Jefferson County’s [long and well-documented history](#) of diluting Black political power, as well as the Commission’s mere monthlong redistricting process to redraw its lines. During this truncated process, the Commission held only one public hearing to invite concerns

from constituents, community leaders, and voting rights advocates, and failed to consider any map that did not crack Black communities of interest to needlessly pack Black people into Commission Districts 1 and 2, and strip them from Districts 3, 4, and 5.

“Packing” refers to placing people of color into the same district in greater numbers than necessary to elect candidates of choice to prevent them from exercising greater political power in surrounding districts. As a result of the Commissions actions over at least the last decade, no Black candidate has ever won election from Districts 3, 4, or 5 despite the recent electoral success of Black voters and candidates in numerous countywide elections.

Alabama is currently the battleground for multiple redistricting lawsuits, including the U.S. Supreme Court case [Merrill v. Milligan](#), which alleges that the state of Alabama violated Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act and the Constitution by diluting Black voting power in its new congressional map. These lawsuits, many filed by Black-led organizations, are an effort to combat the nationwide effort to reduce Black voters’ influence in elections.

Read the complaint filed against the Jefferson County Commission [here](#).

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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.