



**For Immediate Release**  
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## **Black Voters Defend Voting Rights Win in Federal Appellate Court**

Today, the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF), the law firm of Cozen O'Connor, and Ronald L. Wilson, a veteran Louisiana civil rights attorney, delivered arguments in a longstanding voting rights case, *Fusilier, et. al v. Landry*. LDF and co-counsel are urging the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals to uphold trial court decisions that cure Louisiana's discriminatory at-large electoral system for a state court with jurisdiction over Terrebonne Parish, providing Black voters with fair electoral opportunity for the first time ever.

In 2017, a federal trial court [ruled](#) in favor of plaintiffs, Terrebonne Parish NAACP and four Black voters, finding that Louisiana's use of at-large voting to elect the five judges of the 32nd Judicial District Court (32nd JDC), the state court encompassing Terrebonne Parish, violated the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and the U.S. Constitution. Under this at-large voting system, *no* Black candidate has *ever* won a contested election to this state court — and *no* Black candidate has *ever* won an election for any other parish-wide elected office, despite receiving substantial support from Black Terrebonne voters. A remedial ruling provides for the establishment of a redistricting plan for the 32nd JDC that includes a majority-Black sub-district, otherwise known as an "opportunity district," to provide Black voters with an equal opportunity to elect judicial candidates of their choice.

"Advocates for the Black community in Terrebonne have been fighting for decades to end the discriminatory use of at-large voting for 32nd JDC elections — a voting system historically employed throughout Louisiana to suppress Black voting strength," said Leah Aden, LDF's Deputy Director of Litigation. "After more than 20 years of seeking to uproot this discrimination, Black Terrebonne voters secured a crucial voting rights victory that cures the vote dilution in 32nd JDC elections by establishing district-based voting — an electoral system common in Louisiana. It is imperative that the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals uphold the district court's decisions — respecting the trial court's factual findings and following its own precedent — to provide Black Terrebonne voters with their long overdue voting rights."

A court-ordered remedial plan that is set to go into effect in the 2020 judicial elections for the 32nd JDC is familiar to Terrebonne voters because it is based on redistricting plans that have been in place in past Terrebonne elections for other offices. This plan is also consistent with the electoral methods used for many other state courts in Louisiana, including the Louisiana Supreme Court. The Louisiana Attorney General's effort to appeal rulings against it and obstruct this remedy is a shameful attempt to deny Black voters in Terrebonne their rights under the Voting Rights Act and U.S. Constitution.

“After eight days of trial, including 27 witnesses, Judge James Brady found that plaintiffs had clearly established their vote dilution case, siding with experts who found some of the most stark racially-polarized voting anywhere in the country. Candidates supported by Black voters have been consistently and overwhelmingly defeated,” said Michael de Leeuw of Cozen O’Connor. “Judge Brady authored a detailed, thorough, and thoughtful opinion, and today we look to the appellate court to affirm his rulings and enable Black voters to cast votes for their candidates of choice in Terrebonne Parish.”

A ruling in *Fusilier, et. al v. Landry* is expected before the next 32nd JDC election in 2020.

Read the plaintiffs’ appellate brief [here](#) as well as the reply brief of Louisiana’s Attorney General [here](#).

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*Founded in 1940, the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF) is the nation’s first civil and human rights law organization. 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. 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 NAACP Legal Defense Fund or LDF.*

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