

Leading Texas Civil Rights Organizations Call on U.S. Attorney General Holder for Strong Enforcement of Voting Rights

Austin, TX –Leading Texas civil rights organization, including MALDEF, ACLU of Texas, the Rio Grande Valley Equal Voice Network , La Fe Policy Research and Education Center, Texas League of Young Voters Education Fund, Mi Familia Vota, National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO) Educational Fund, Progress Texas, Common Cause of Texas, Texas LULAC, Coffee Party of Austin, Southwest Workers Union, Texas NAACP, Southwest Voter Registration Education Project, League Of Women Voters- Texas issued the following statement with respect to U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder’s planned remarks at the Lyndon B Johnson Library at The University of Texas at Austin on December 13, 2011:

“Texas is home to the second largest Latino population in the U.S. and demographic projections show that by 2040, Latinos will constitute the majority of citizens in the state. Texas also possesses a growing Asian-American population and an African-American population of more than 2 million. The increasing number of racial and ethnic minority citizens in Texas highlights the need to protect vigilantly the voting rights of the state’s minority electorate.

The Voting Rights Act of 1965, signed by President Lyndon B. Johnson, is considered the most successful civil rights legislation in our nation’s history. Legal protection for the minority electorate in Texas is as critical today as it was then.

Infringements on minority voting rights persist and noncompliance with the VRA continues at the state and local level in Texas. According to the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), since 1982, Texas has had the second highest number of Section 5 (preclearance) objections interposed by the DOJ -- including at least 107 objections, 10 of which were for statewide voting changes. At least 206 successful Section 2 (vote dilution) cases have been brought in Texas since 1982. These cases constitute nearly one-third of all such cases in the nine states covered statewide by Section 5.

Texas continues to enact potentially discriminatory electoral reforms including the much criticized mandatory photo identification legislation and redistricting maps that decreased the number and percentage of minority opportunity districts in the Texas Legislature and Texas Congressional delegation, despite the overwhelming growth of minorities in Texas. Texas continually fails to comply with registration requirements under the National Voter Registration Act and the language-minority protections provided for in section 203 of the Voting Rights Act.

The Voting Rights Act and other laws aimed at protecting the rights of the electorate are only as powerful as their enforcement. The Department of Justice must stand up for the principles of the Voting Rights Act and not permit state and local officials to ignore its requirements. We look forward to Attorney General Holder’s remarks and hope they serve as a renewed commitment to guard against the backsliding that would occur if the VRA’s enforcement were weakened or abandoned.”

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