



For Immediate Release: July 29, 2013

Contact: Rafael Ramirez Solórzano (714) 390-0814 or rsolorzano2003@yahoo.com

Ruling on Anaheim Voting Lawsuit Expected Tomorrow

Hearing comes after council's move to enact modified at-large voting system, over protests by community leaders and residents.

Anaheim – An important procedural ruling is expected Tuesday, in a case filed by the ACLU and Anaheim community leaders over the city's voting laws. The lawsuit, filed in June of last year, alleges that the city's voting system violates the California Voting Rights Act by inherently discriminating against the city's Latino residents. The plaintiffs have argued for district-based voting to replace the city's current at-large system. Proponents of election reform say that district voting would create a more equitable, accountable government, and would address deep flaws in the city's political structure.

Last week, the Anaheim city council moved forward on its plan to enact a modified at-large voting system, which requires that council members live in districts that will be drawn up by the council. Under that plan, council members would still be elected by residents city-wide.

The move drew protests from community activists, who rallied outside the council chambers. Critics say that the modification does nothing to change the unfair election system, and argue that only real district elections would create a representative government in Anaheim. Most large cities elect their representatives by district.

In response to the ACLU lawsuit, the city of Anaheim formed a citizens advisory committee to explore alternatives to the at-large system. After months of meetings in venues across the city, the committee recommended that the council give Anaheim residents the opportunity to decide their political future, in the form of a ballot initiative on district elections. The council ignored the committee's recommendation.

Community activists will pack the courtroom on Tuesday in anticipation of the ruling. They say that their campaign for election reform will continue, whatever the result. "We need district elections now," said Martin Lopez, a former member of the advisory committee. "The at-large system is a detriment to democracy, because of the cost of running a city-wide campaign," he said. "District elections would help level the playing field."

The issue drew national media attention in July of last year following days of unrest in the city in the aftermath of two fatal police shootings of two men in Anaheim. The outrage over the shootings brought to light vast inequities between the city's elite and its poorer, underserved residents.

The hearing in Anaheim comes shortly after a ruling on a similar case in Palmdale, California, where a judge ruled that that city's at-large voting system violated the voting rights of minorities.

The hearing will take place at 9:00 AM at the Orange County Superior Court of California, in room C14. The court is located at 700 Civic Center Drive West in Santa Ana.

###