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VOTERS PREVAIL IN LAWSUIT CHALLENGING ABC UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT'S AT-LARGE ELECTION OF BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Settlement Secures Elections By District Under California Voting Rights Act

LOS ANGELES, CA – Today, MALDEF and co-counsel Goldstein, Borgen, Dardarian & Ho announced a settlement in their lawsuit against ABC Unified School District (ABC USD) for violating the *California Voting Rights Act* of 2001 (CVRA). The CVRA provides a method for communities to challenge at-large elections when patterns of racially polarized voting result in diminished voting power for minority communities. The District was using an at-large method to elect its Board of Trustees, which the Plaintiffs, three voters in the ABC USD, alleged denied Latino residents the opportunity to elect Board Members of their choice for more than 15 years. Under the settlement announced today, the District will implement a district-based election system, which will provide all voters, regardless of race, an opportunity to elect candidates of their choice and influence election outcomes.

"California's future depends upon the success of our public education system; that system works best when community interests are fairly represented," stated Thomas A. Saenz, President and General Counsel of MALDEF. "This settlement ensures better representation of the entire ABC USD community in tackling the critical education policy issues faced by the trustees."

The settlement means that ABC USD candidates will be voted upon only by registered voters of the same area in which they reside and will represent. ABC USD will retain a demographer that will create map options for a single-member-district election method featuring seven trustee areas. The proposed plans will then be available for review and input by members of the public. Under the agreement, the new voting map must comply with state and federal election laws and shall, at a minimum, contain at least one Latino-majority Citizen Voting Age Population ("CVAP") district.

Laura Ho, partner at Goldstein, Borgen, Dardarian & Ho and attorney for the plaintiffs said, "Our clients, representing the Latino voters and the parents of Latino school children of the School District, are pleased that the School District has recognized that the interests of the entire

community are best served by complying voluntarily with the CVRA and by creating a district election system which assures residents of the diverse areas of the District will be able to select representatives of their choice who are accountable to them. We commend the District on its cooperative actions and look forward to further cooperation in the process of developing and implementing district maps and election schedules that will fairly carry out the promise of this settlement.”

“MALDEF welcomes the opportunity for the Latino community in the ABC Unified School District to have a meaningful influence in Board elections. This settlement highlights the importance of the CVRA and brings positive democratic change to the elections process,” said Matthew Barragan, MALDEF attorney.

The lawsuit was brought forth by three plaintiffs, including Olga Rios, who attended ABC USD schools for her entire K-12 education and has two children in the district. She applied for an open position on the Board two years ago and was interviewed. But, the district decided not to appoint anybody to the position until the next election, despite Olga’s exceptional credentials in education, including a Master’s Degree in education from Harvard University.

Ms. Rios stated: “I applaud the ABC board members for creating a space for the Latino voice. This settlement provides the residents of Hawaiian Gardens an opportunity to vote for and elect a candidate of their choice and have the kind of representation that mirrors their community. We can now elect someone to represent our interests and advocate for our unique needs. This change can only mean an even higher quality of education for all students. As a parent and a voter, I am truly excited and proud of the Board’s decision. What a great day!”

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