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7	IN THE SUPERIOR COURT	OF THE STATE OF ARIZONA
8	IN AND FOR THE CO	OUNTY OF MARICOPA
9	MARICOPA COUNTY REPUBLICAN	Case No. CV2018-013963
10	PARTY, APACHE COUNTY REPUBLICAN PARTY, NAVAJO	
11	COUNTY REPUBLICAN PARTY, and YUMA COUNTY REPUBLICAN PARTY,	DEFENDANT-INTERVENORS LEAGUE OF UNITED LATIN
12	Plaintiffs,	AMERICAN CITIZENS OF
13	Fiamums,	ARIZONA, LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF ARIZONA, AND
14	V.	ARIZONA ADVOCACY NETWORK
15	MICHELE REAGAN, in her official capacity	FOUNDATION'S BRIEF IN RESPONSE TO PLAINTIFFS'
16	as Arizona Secretary of State, EDISON J. WAUNEKA, in his official capacity as	MOTION FOR A TEMPORARY RESTRAINING ORDER
17	Apache County Recorder; DAVID W. STEVENS, in his official capacity as Cochise	
18	County Recorder; PATTY HANSEN, in her	(Assigned to the Hon. Margaret Mahoney)
19	official capacity as Coconino County Recorder; SADIE JO BINGHAM, in her	Trainerie;)
20	official capacity as Gila County Recorder; WENDY JOHN, in her official capacity as	
21	Graham County Recorder; BERTA MANUZ, in her official capacity as Greenlee County	
22	Recorder; SHELLY BAKER, in her official	
23	capacity as La Paz County Recorder; ADRIAN FOTNES, in his official capacity as	
24	Maricopa County Recorder; KRISTI BLAIR, in her official capacity as Mohave County	
25 I	Recorder; DORIS CLARK, in her official	
25 26	capacity as Navajo County Recorder; F. ANN RODRIGUEZ, in her official capacity as Pima	

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Recorder; SUZANNE SAINZ, in her official capacity as Santa Cruz County Recorder; LESLIE M. HOFFMAN, in her official capacity as Yavapai County Recorder; ROBYN STALLWORTH PUQUETTE, in her official capacity as Yuma County Recorder.

Defendants.

Defendant-Intervenors LEAGUE OF UNITED LATIN AMERICAN CITIZENS OF ARIZONA ("LULAC-AZ"), LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF ARIZONA ("LWV-AZ"), and ARIZONA ADVOCACY NETWORK FOUNDATION ("AANF") respectfully submit this Brief in Response to Plaintiffs' Motion for a Temporary Restraining Order. Voters have a procedural due process right, guaranteed by the United States Constitution, to notice and an opportunity to cure alleged early ballot signature mismatches. As the stipulated facts make clear, not all Arizona counties are complying with this mandate, creating a patchwork system across the state. But the Court should not remedy the violation of that right by some Arizona counties by ordering all Arizona counties to deny voters due process.

Thus, if this Court is inclined to address the uniformity question on an emergency basis, it should order all counties to provide voters with notice and an opportunity to confirm their signatures through Wednesday, November 14, 2018—the deadline to cure conditional provisional ballots. Otherwise voters will not only suffer a due process deprivation, but also a denial of equal protection; voters who timely submitted ballots cannot be treated differently depending upon whether signature mismatch issues are identified by the County before or after the submission deadline. This is particularly so

given that voters reasonably relied upon the public statements of recorders that signature issues could be cured post-Election Day. Plaintiffs were aware of those public statements and attendant voter reliance, yet waited until Election Day had passed to file this lawsuit.

ARGUMENT

I. Procedural Due Process Requires Notice and an Opportunity to Cure All Early Ballot Signature Mismatch Issues.

Voters have a procedural due process right to notice and an opportunity to cure any alleged signature mismatches on early ballots. "Because voting is a fundamental right, the right to vote is a 'liberty' interest which may not be confiscated without due process." *Raetzel v. *Parks/Bellemont Absentee Election Bd., 762 F. Supp. 1354, 1357 (D. Ariz. 1990). The right to procedural due process extends equally to votes cast by early ballot. "[O]nce the state creates an absentee voting regime, [it] 'must administer it in accordance with the Constitution." *Martin v. Kemp, __F. Supp. 3d __, 2018 WL 5276242, at *8 (N.D. Ga. Oct. 24, 2018) (quoting Zessar v. Helander, No. 05 C 1917, 2006 WL 642646, at *6 (N.D. Ill. 2006)). As the *Raetzel* court noted, "while the state is able to regulate absentee voting, it cannot disqualify ballots, and thus disenfranchise voters, without affording the individual appropriate due process protection." *Id.*

To determine what process is due, courts apply the *Matthews v. Eldridge* balancing test. First, the Court must consider "the private interest that will be affected by the official action." *Matthews v. Eldridge*, 424 U.S. 319, 335 (1976). Second, the Court should assess "the risk of an erroneous deprivation of such interest through the procedures used, and the probative value, if any, of additional or substitute procedural safeguards." *Id.* Third, the Court should consider "the Government's interest, including

the function involved and the fiscal and administrative burden that the additional or substitute procedural requirements would entail." *Id.* The application of the *Matthews* test here compels the conclusion that all voters must be provided notice and an opportunity to cure signature mismatches by confirming their signature; voters may not be denied that due process simply because they timely returned their ballots closer to the deadline than other voters.

First, the private interest is the exercise of fundamental constitutional right to vote. See <u>Raetzel</u>, 762 F. Supp. at 1358 (noting the "important fundamental interest in voting" applicable to absentee balloting); <u>Martin</u>, 2018 WL 5276242, at *8 (concluding, in signature mismatch case, that "the private interest at issue implicates the individual's fundamental right to vote and is therefore entitled to substantial weight"). The first <u>Matthews</u> factor points strongly in the direction of affording all voters notice and an opportunity for cure.

Second, the risk of erroneous deprivation is high and a notice and opportunity for cure for all voters would significantly mitigate against that risk. In 2016, 2,657 mail-in ballots in Arizona were rejected because officials deemed the ballot's signature not to match the signature on record. See Oct. 22, 2018 Letter to Sec'y Reagan at 1 (attached as exhibit to Defendant-Intervenors Motion to Intervene). That number can be outcome determinative, and any deprivation is constitutionally problematic: "even rates of rejection well under one percent translate to the disenfranchisement of dozens, if not

Counsel for the Maricopa County Recorder represented to the Court at the November 8, 2016 Status Conference that at least 5,600 ballots would be at risk in the present election.

hundreds, of otherwise qualified voters, election after election." Saucedo v. Gardner, F. Supp. 3d , 2018 WL 3862704 (D.N.H. Aug. 14, 2018). The risk of wrongful rejection—that an official has incorrectly flagged a signature-matching problem—and resultant disenfranchisement, is high. Arizona does not require election officials to undergo any handwriting analysis training. See id. ("Neither state law nor any guidance from state agencies sets forth functional standards for comparing signatures and assessing variations; election officials are not required to undergo any training in handwriting analysis."). And courts have recognized that "laypersons are more likely to wrongly determine that authentic signatures are not genuine that to make the opposite error." *Id.* (emphasis in original). A number of factors can cause a voter's authentic signature to vary from that on the state's records, including "age, physical and mental condition, disability, stress, accidental occurrences," and others, and experts have opined that "[v]ariations are more prevalent in writers who are elderly, disabled, ill, or who speak English as a second language." *Id.* at *7.

Not only is the risk of erroneous deprivation great but the probative value of offering notice and an opportunity to cure through signature confirmation is high. As the Northern District of Georgia recently concluded in a challenge to Georgia's signature mismatch regime, "permitting an absentee voter to resolve an alleged signature discrepancy [] has the very tangible benefit of avoiding disenfranchisement." *Martin*, 2018 WL 5276242, at *9. Moreover, in contacting the voter and communicating with them directly, election officials can satisfy themselves of the voter's identity and confirm

that the ballot is genuine; such a process is therefore highly probative and protective of a fundamental right.

Third, the government's burden in providing notice and an opportunity for cure for those voters' whose signatures are questioned after the 7:00 PM ballot submission deadline on Election Day is low. Arizona's county recorders uniformly provide notice and an opportunity to cure to voters for any alleged signature mismatches identified prior to Election Day, and thus already have a process in place for affording those voters due process. See Elections Procedures Manual (2014) at 60, 166 ("Manual"). Counties do not need to create a new process in order to ensure all voters' due process rights are protected. See Martin, 2018 WL 5276242, at *9 ("[T]he additional procedures impose a minimal burden on [the State] because the statute elsewhere already provides notice, a hearing, and an opportunity to appeal for absentee voters whose ballots are challenged for ineligibility."); Fla. Democratic Party v. Detzner, No. 4:16cv607-MW/CAS, 2016 WL 6090943, at *8 (N.D. Fla. Oct. 16, 2016) ("There is no reason that same procedure cannot be implemented (rather, re-implemented) for mismatched-signature ballots."). Moreover, there is no reason the counties cannot follow the same deadline for curing early ballot mismatched signatures as they already follow for curing provision ballot issues. See Martin, 2018 WL 5276242, at *9 ("Defendants fail to explain why it would impose a severe hardship to afford absentee voters a similar process for curing mismatched signature ballots as for curing qualification challenges or casting a provisional ballot.").

Defendant Yavapai County Recorder's (YCR) contention that the deadline to cure a signature must be the same as the deadline to return an early ballot is self-

defeating. See YCR Resp. at 3-4 ("Because all early ballots must be received by 7:00 p.m. on election night and the Recorder must process those ballots upon receipt, further attempts to contact voters regarding mismatched signatures should cease at that time."). Under YCR's logic, there would be no opportunity to cure any early-ballot signatures, regardless of when they were received, because, according to YCR, they must be processed upon receipt. Yet, Arizona law clearly provides that County Records "shall ... make a reasonable and meaningful attempt to contact the early voter." Manual at 60 (emphasis added). Moreover, the Elections Procedures Manual expressly contemplates that rejected ballots, i.e. ballots that have signature mismatches, need not be transmitted to the early ballot board until the last day of processing. See Manual at 169 ("This step normally only applies to the last day of processing, where any possible rejected items are given to the boards to process. These items include: . . . signature does not match, according to the County Recorder or other officer in charge of elections who performed the signature comparison."). It's axiomatic that Election Day is not the last day to process early ballots.

Moreover, YCR's reliance on the early-ballot procedure to challenge a voter's eligibility to vote is misplaced. If anything, it demonstrates that Arizona law requires that the County Recorders provide notice to voters before their early ballot is rejected and that such notice can occur *after* 7pm on Election Day. *See* YCR Resp. at 5 ("Therefore, notice must be made before 5:00 p.m. on Saturday, November 10, 2018 for personal service or Thursday at 5:00 p.m. on November 8, 2018 for service by mail."). YCR's

position is definitively undercut by the fact that Pima County and others have allowed a post-Election Day cure period for several cycles without incident.

Any administrative burden the government might cite is insufficient to overcome the voters' interests in due process protection for their fundamental right to vote. "The right to choose that [the Supreme Court] has been so zealous to protect, means, at the least, that States may not casually deprive a class of individuals of the right to vote because of some remote administrative benefit to the State." *Carrington v. Rash*, 380 U.S. 89, 96 (1965). While there is no doubt some administrative burden in continuing to provide voters with notice and an opportunity to cure signature mismatch issues past 7 PM on Election Day, that burden "pales in comparison to that imposed by unconstitutionally depriving those voters of their right to vote and to have their votes counted." *Detzner*, 2016 WL 6090943, at *8.

The *Matthews* test weighs heavily in the favor of the voter. Every court to address this particular question has held that signature-matching requirements must be accompanied by notice and an opportunity to cure. *See, e.g., Saucedo*, 2018 WL 3862704 (striking down New Hampshire's absentee ballot signature match requirement for failure to provide pre-deprivation notice and opportunity to cure perceived mismatches); *Zessar v. Helander*, No. 05 C 1917, 2006 WL 642646 (N.D. III. March 13, 2006), *vacated as moot sub. nom Zessar v. Keith*, 536F.3d 788 (7th Cir. 2008) (striking down prior Illinois signature match regime that failed to provide pre-deprivation notice and opportunity to cure).

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Moreover, the importance of maintaining adequate notice practices that are already in place is particularly high here because of voters' reliance on the public statements that were made in advance of the election by Maricopa and Pima Counties. To conclude otherwise would disenfranchise voters who acted in reasonable reliance on these statements—unchallenged by anyone until the belated filing of this lawsuit. The Constitution requires that all counties extend procedural due process rights to all early ballot voters, regardless of precisely when they timely submitted their ballots, or when the counties identified the alleged signature mismatch.

II. One Constitutional Violation—Disparate Standards for Notice and Cure— Cannot be Remedied by Creating Other Constitutional Violations— **Procedural Due Process and Equal Protection Violations.**

One constitutional violation cannot be traded for others. Yet that is precisely what would happened if the Court attempted to remedy the current disparate treatment across Arizona counties by ordering those counties properly affording voters due process to stop doing so. Not only would doing so deprive voters of their procedural due process rights, as discussed above, but it would also create a new Equal Protection violations.

First, as the Florida district court noted in *Detzner*, rejecting ballots without notice for wrongful signature mismatch determinations constitutes a severe burden on the right to vote—indeed, an outright denial.

After the election, thousands of those same voters—through no fault of their own and without any notice or opportunity to cure—will learn that their vote was not counted. If disenfranchising thousands of eligible voters does not amount to a severe burden on the right to vote, then this Court is at a loss as to what does . . . [T]he State of Florida has categorically disenfranchised thousands of voters arguably for no reason other than they have poor handwriting or their handwriting has changed over time.

<u>Detzner</u>, 2016 WL 6090943, at *6–7. The same would be true if the counties currently affording notice and cure rights to voters are ordered to stop (and is currently true for those counties not affording notice and cure rights).

Second, imposing an artificial 7 PM deadline on Election Day for signature confirmation would simply swap one equal protection violation for another. Although all counties would impose the same deadline, that deadline would ensure that whether a voter's timely cast ballot will ultimately count would turn on when they turn in their ballot, even if they turn it in well within the statutory deadline.

Finally, ordering the counties that have continued offering notice and an opportunity to cure to stop *now* would exacerbate the equal protection problem. Doing so would arbitrarily treat the same category of voters within those counties—those whose signature issues were not cured prior to 7 PM on Election Day—differently depending upon whether they managed to cure any issue prior to an order of this Court enjoining further cure opportunities. As Plaintiffs contend, Mot. at 4, similarly situated voters may not be treated differently. *See Bush v. Gore*, 531 U.S. 98, 104–105 (2000) ("Having once granted the right to vote on equal terms, the State may not, by later arbitrary and disparate treatment, value one person's vote over that of another."); *see also* 52 U.S.C. § 10101(a)(2)(A) (providing that "[n]o person acting under color of law" may "apply any standard, practice, or procedure different from the standards, practices, or procedures applied . . . to other individuals within the same county . . . who have been found by State official to be qualified to vote").

The same deadline applied by Maricopa and Coconino Counties should be applied to curing signature issues statewide. *See* Parties' Joint Stipulated Factual Statement at ¶¶ 3, 6. That is the only way to protect procedural due process rights, treat all voters on equal footing, *and* avoid creating new equal protection violations.

III. Plaintiffs' Request to Enjoin Further Notice and Opportunity for Cure is Barred by Laches.

Laches requires denial of injunctive relief precluding further notice and opportunity for cure by voters with signature mismatch issues. *See, e.g., Ariz. Pub. Integrity All. Inc. v. Bennett*, No. CV-14-01044-PHX-NVW, 2014 WL 3715130, at *2 (D. Ariz. June 23, 2014). While Plaintiffs have identified a constitutional problem that can and should be resolved by this Court requiring notice and opportunity to confirm signatures across all counties, Plaintiffs are barred by laches from attempting to "level down" and order counties to stop providing a post-Election Day cure period. Plaintiffs knew of these policies prior to Election Day and their delay in seeking to eliminate a cure period will cause undue prejudice to voters, who cast their ballots under the current rules and procedures in place for this election cycle.

Laches applies to a request for equitable relief when "(1) a delay in asserting a right or claim; (2) that the delay was not excusable; and (3) that the delay caused the defendant undue prejudice." <u>Seller Agency Council, Inc. v. Kennedy Center for Real Estate Educ., Inc.</u>, 621 F.3d 981, 989 (9th Cir. 2010) (quotation omitted). As discussed below those three elements are present here.

Plaintiffs are challenging practices that were explicitly and publicly identified by the LULAC intervenors two weeks prior to this election, yet Plaintiffs waited until after

the election to bring this emergency suit. See October 22, 2018 Letter to Sec'y Reagan (attached as exhibit to Defendant-Intervenors Motion for Intervention). As Plaintiff-Intervenor Arizona Republican Party explained in its November 4, 2018 letter to the counties, it was aware of the practices in place for this election cycle, at the very least before the election took place. Plaintiffs delayed beyond the last minute and waited until after the election when the ballot canvass is midstream before filing the present complaint. Although a change to expand the pool of valid ballots that are counted is still possible without causing injury, a change to eliminate a cure period upon which voters relied would unduly prejudice voters.

Plaintiffs' delay is inexcusable, particularly where voters have already cast their ballots in reliance on the current rules in place for curing and counting ballots. In *Arizona Democratic Party v. Reagan*, the district court denied a preliminary injunction due to delay and timing of the election. No. CV-16-03618-PHX-SPL, 2016 WL 6523427, at *14 (D. Ariz. Nov. 3, 2016). Arizona state courts have similarly cautioned that "a party's failure to diligently prosecute an election appeal may in future cases result in a dismissal for laches," noting that "in the context of elections the laches doctrine seeks to prevent dilatory conduct and will bar a claim if a party's unreasonable delay prejudices the opposing party or the administration of justice." Lubin v. Thomas, 213 Ariz. 496, 497 ¶ 10 (2006). Plaintiffs' delay renders their eleventh-hour emergency motion unreasonable, particularly if the result would be a restriction of voters' rights in counties with constitutionally sound notice and cure policies.

Most crucially, Plaintiffs' delay will cause undue prejudice to Arizona voters who cast their ballots under the current rules and procedures in place for this election cycle. As Pima and Maricopa Defendants explained on the Court's November 8 telephonic status conference, they are in the midst of counting early ballots, and Arizona law does not authorize them to go back and reject early ballots already cured and counted. Any change to election policies mid-canvas may disrupt election administration, but an eleventh-hour change that burdens voters' constitutionally protected right to vote causes more substantial prejudice, and should be denied.

IV. Conclusion

All voters are entitled to procedural due process and equal protection. This Court should order *all* Arizona counties to offer voters whose signatures are questioned notice and an opportunity to cure through the deadline for resolving provisional ballot issues—five business days after the election (Wednesday, November 14, 2018). Any "remedy" that would order counties to stop providing constitutionally mandated notice and opportunity to respond would create far more constitutional violations than it would cure.

1	RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED this 8th day of November, 2018.
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1	E-FILED with the Clerk, Maricopa County
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