



THE VOTING RIGHTS INSTITUTE

A project of the American Constitution Society, the Campaign Legal Center & Georgetown University Law Center

ABOUT

In 2013, the U.S. Supreme Court invalidated a key provision of the Voting Rights Act (VRA), which required the federal government to preclear any voting changes in parts of the country that have a history of discrimination in voting. This provision of the VRA prevented many discriminatory voting laws from going into effect.

Immediately after the Supreme Court's decision, many states, which would have once had to preclear their voting changes, passed discriminatory voting restrictions. The only way to stop these restrictions today is to file legal challenges to these laws in court. But litigation is time-consuming and expensive, and it places a heavy burden on victims of discrimination and the few civil rights groups trained to take on these cases.

The VRI is working to prepare the next generation of attorneys, experts and activists to preserve our democracy and protect the ability of all Americans to vote. By providing resources, litigating, educating, training and conducting new and original research, the VRI is growing the pool of voting rights attorneys and experts at this crucial time when they are needed the most.

OUR IMPACT

In December 2015, the Waller County Commissioners Court in Texas voted to drastically reduce the number of early voting locations from eight to two before the March 2016 presidential primary. The new plan eliminated both early polling locations in the only precinct in the county that was majority people of color – one in the African American city of Prairie View, and another on the campus of Prairie View A & M University, a historically black university.

Waller County voters contacted the VRI for help. The VRI wrote a letter to the County Judge, the Elections Administrator and the County Commissioners, urging them to reverse course and protect early voting locations in Prairie View. After learning about the impact of the change, and recognizing the possible threat of litigation, the Commissioners Court voted to increase the number of early voting locations to six, including one location in the city of Prairie View within walking distance of the university campus. Later the County re-established the second polling place on the campus of Prairie View A&M as well.

WHAT WE DO

PROVIDE RESOURCES:

The VRI Website, <http://www.votingrightsinstitute.org>, is a go-to educational resource for the voting rights community. It provides allies in this work a forum to seek advice and share best practices, including helpful examples of litigation documents to serve as templates, model pleadings and expert documents.

LITIGATE:

The VRI protects the fundamental right to vote by directly representing parties and filing friend of the court briefs in appellate courts and the U.S. Supreme Court. Our cases have involved challenges to voter ID laws, polling station closures, racial gerrymanders, partisan gerrymanders and other measures that are racially discriminatory or burden the right to vote.

EDUCATE:

The VRI is the first-ever clinical-type program on voting rights in the nation. The legal clinic provides hands-on practical training for law students in the field of voting rights and offers current students, recent graduates and fellows the opportunity to take on voting rights cases and work directly with seasoned voting rights litigators from premier civil rights organizations.

TRAIN:

The VRI holds training sessions in cities across the country to educate future voting rights litigators and experts on the current state of voting rights law and trends in voting rights violations. Some of the most noted practitioners in the country have served as instructors on our panels. We've held nine trainings, with several more scheduled for 2016.

RESEARCH:

The VRI works with academics to conduct and disseminate research that will expand litigation strategies. This includes exploring theories of recognizing voting as a First Amendment right and continuously surveying the state of gerrymandering standards across the country. The VRI also explores ways to advance the work of experts in the field of voting rights who are developing technological tools to make it easier to vote.

For more information, contact info@votingrightsinstitute.org