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Contact: Lacy Crawford, lcrawford@lawyerscommittee.org, (202)-558-7900,
press@lawyerscommittee.org

**San Juan County, New Mexico Board of Commissioners
Redistricting Plan Violates the Voting Rights of Navajo Nation
Citizens**

Map Unlawfully Dilutes Indigenous Voting Power

(Washington, DC) — The Board of Commissioners of San Juan County, New Mexico adopted a redistricting plan that denies San Juan County’s Navajo Nation citizens and other Indigenous voters an equal opportunity to participate in the political process and to elect representatives of their choice in violation of Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act, according to a [lawsuit](#) filed Thursday by civil rights advocates against the county.

The [Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law](#), the [ACLU of New Mexico](#), [UCLA Voting Rights Project](#), and the Navajo Nation Department of Justice and DLA Piper are representing, the Navajo Nation, Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission (NNHRC) and five Navajo voters. The complaint was filed in the U.S. District Court for the District Court of New Mexico.

According to the [suit](#), the Board of Commissioners’ recently-adopted map severely packs Indigenous voters into one of the five districts, effectively depriving them of an equal opportunity to elect candidates of their choice in the other four districts despite them constituting almost 40 percent of the county’s total population. The Board of Commissioners adopted this map over the express objection of the Navajo Nation, Navajo Nation citizen residents of San Juan County, and the ACLU of New Mexico, and despite the Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission submitting a proposed map that more evenly distributed the Indigenous population across two districts while also better complying with other redistricting criteria than the adopted map.

While San Juan County's total population decreased between 2010 and 2020, its Indigenous population increased such that Indigenous people—over 90 percent of whom are citizens of the Navajo Nation—now constitute the largest racial or ethnic group in the county.

The lawsuit requests that the court order the implementation of a new districting plan for the San Juan County Board of Commissioners that complies with Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act by creating two districts in which Indigenous voters have an equal opportunity to elect representatives of their choice.

Plaintiff LoRenzo C. Bates: “It’s time we see equal and equitable representation in the county government that reflects the changing population demographics for the next ten years. Native Americans request San Juan County to provide an opportunity for the election of a candidate of our choice.”

“The Voting Rights Act was designed to prevent exactly this kind of egregious dilution of the voting power of communities of color,” said **Ezra Rosenberg, co-director of the Voting Rights Project of the Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law**. “San Juan County has a legal duty to ensure that all voters have an equal opportunity to elect candidates of their choice. Instead, they have attempted to do the opposite, and this plan must be struck down.”

“The Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission continues to advocate for Navajo voters to elect candidates of their choice in the lawsuit filed against San Juan County, New Mexico. The County Commission adopted a redistricting map that disenfranchises Navajo voters” said **Leonard Gorman, Executive Director of Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission**. “The Voting Rights Act sets standards for minority societies in the United States, and the Navajo Nation has followed those standards when proposing Navajo Nation maps for San Juan County Commission. The Navajo Nation priority is to maintain compliance with the Voting Rights Act and San Juan County Commission must respect the Voting Rights Act standards and the principals of redistricting when it comes to majority minority districts.”

“The sovereignty and voting rights of the Navajo people must be respected by local and county governments. The San Juan County Commission chose a map that will significantly divide and lessen the voting power of the largest Sovereign Nation in the United States. The Navajo Nation believes the commissioners have disenfranchised the Native American vote in District 2 and this action does not allow the people to select a leader of their choice. We will fight to protect the

vote of thousands of Indigenous people in northern New Mexico at all costs,” said **Speaker Seth Damon (Bááhaali, Chichiltah, Manuelito, Red Rock, Rock Springs, Tséyatoh)**.

“The fight to ensure the voting rights of all Americans is taking place in county and state courthouses all across the nation. In San Juan County, the Native American population must have their right to vote and to meaningfully choose candidates that represent their community's needs protected from the Board of Commissioners’ dilutive districting plan,” said **Bernadette Reyes, UCLA Voting Rights Projects staff attorney**.

“The current redistricting map adopted by San Juan County repeats the long and shameful history of disenfranchising Indigenous communities,” said **Preston Sanchez, ACLU of New Mexico's Indigenous Justice Attorney**. “The County is obligated under law to ensure that the redistricting process results in Indigenous voters having adequate legislative representation by candidates of their choice. The ACLU of New Mexico will continue to fight any plan that violates the laws, practices and procedures intended to protect the rights of Indigenous voters.”

Read the complaint [here](#).

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***About the Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law** – The Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law (Lawyers’ Committee), a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization, was formed in 1963 at the request of President John F. Kennedy to involve the private bar in providing legal services to address racial discrimination. The principal mission of the Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law is to secure, through the rule of law, equal justice for all, particularly in the areas of voting rights, criminal justice, fair housing and community development, economic justice, educational opportunities, and hate crimes.*

***About the UCLA Voting Rights Project** – The UCLA Voting Rights Project is the flagship project of the UCLA Latino Policy & Politics Initiative aimed at creating an accessible and equitable system of voting for all Americans through impact litigation, research, and clinical education to expand access to the ballot box.*

***About the ACLU of New Mexico** - The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of NM is the New Mexico state affiliate of the ACLU, the nation’s premier civil rights and civil liberties organization.*

The purpose of ACLU of NM is to protect and advance justice, liberty and equity as guaranteed by the constitutions of New Mexico and the United States. We work to make justice, liberty and equity realities for all people in New Mexico, with particular attention to the rights of people and groups who have historically been disenfranchised.