

MALDEF, KERN COUNTY REACH SETTLEMENT IN LANDMARK VOTING RIGHTS LAWSUIT

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Bakersfield, CA - MALDEF and attorneys for Kern County, California announced an agreement today on a new Board of Supervisors districting plan that will respect Latinos' right to elect candidates of their choice.

The settlement follows a February federal court ruling, following an 11-day trial in December, that a redistricting plan adopted in 2011 by the Board of Supervisors violated Section 2 of the federal Voting Rights Act. After negotiations at a settlement conference on Wednesday, plaintiffs and their attorneys from MALDEF (Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund) and Kern County agreed on a new district map that will create a second Latino majority district in compliance with the February order issued by U.S. District Court Judge Dale A. Drozd.

"Today's swift settlement following the court's post-trial decision provides hope that Kern County will soon attain a governing body that fairly represents the entire community," said Thomas A. Saenz, president and general counsel of MALDEF. "The settlement also stands as an example to all California jurisdictions of their obligation to draw district lines in a fair and evenhanded manner, respectful always of equal voting rights."

Under the 2011 map declared unlawful by Judge Drozd, the boundary between District 1 and District 4 unlawfully fractured a large cohesive Latino community, submerging their votes in a larger white electorate in both districts, thereby diluting Latino voters' ability to participate effectively in the political process.

The settlement, approved today by Magistrate Judge Jennifer L. Thurston in Bakersfield Federal Court, remedies the violation with a new map that redraws District 4 as the county's second Latino majority district. The new plan will be implemented in the 2018 elections.

"The new plan ensures that the democratic process leading to the election of members to the Board of Supervisors for the first time will be equally open to all Kern County voters, and that Latino voters will be afforded a reasonable opportunity to participate meaningfully in that political process by electing a candidate of choice to the Board in two districts," said Denise M. Hulett, MALDEF national senior counsel and lead counsel in the case.

The 2016 lawsuit, *Luna et al v. County of Kern et al*, marked the first challenge to a California jurisdiction for violating the federal Voting Rights Act since 2001.

Read the settlement agreement [here](#), see the new districting maps [here](#), and read a timeline of significant dates in the case [here](#).

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WHEN : 2018-04-05 22:34:27

WHERE :

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MALDEF, the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, directs its efforts to the protection

and defense of the Latino community in the United States. In doing so, we champion constitutional rights for everyone in the United States. Recognized as one of the nation's leading national civil rights organizations, MALDEF opened its doors in 1968, founded by Latino activists from throughout the southwestern United States, to pursue civil rights for the Latino community through the legal system. MALDEF has earned, through its history, a reputation as the "law firm of the Latino community."