



National Headquarters: 634 S. Spring Street, Los Angeles, CA 90014

Office: 213-629-2512

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CONTACT:
Larry Gonzalez: (202) 466-0879
lgonzalez@rabengroup.com

Donald Gatlin: (202) 587-2871
dgatlin@rabengroup.com

MALDEF DEMANDS SYSTEMIC ELECTORAL CHANGES IN CITY OF GARDEN GROVE, CALIFORNIA

No Latino Has Been Elected to the City Council Since the Middle of Last Century

GARDEN GROVE, CA—Today, MALDEF sent a letter to the City Manager and City Attorney for the City of Garden Grove, demanding that the system for electing city council members be changed to comply with the California Voting Rights Act (CVRA). Garden Grove currently elects city council members using an at-large method that has denied Latino residents the opportunity to elect candidates of their choice. MALDEF demands the system be changed to a district-based system.

“Representative democracy works best when it is just that -- representative of all major constituent groups,” stated Thomas A. Saenz, MALDEF President and General Counsel. “The record in Garden Grove demonstrates the need for reform, which is also legally mandated by the California Voting Rights Act, to ensure that voices from throughout the city are represented in council deliberations on critical municipal policy.”

MALDEF conducted an investigation after receiving complaints from Garden Grove Latino citizens and voters that the at-large election system historically resulted in the complete lack of Latino representation on the city council. The investigation confirmed citizen suspicions. There has been no Latino member of the Garden Grove City Council since the middle of the last century, despite a 37 percent Latino population in the district.

The CVRA states that “[A]n at-large method of election may not be imposed or applied in a manner that impairs the ability of a protected class to elect candidates of its choice or its ability

to influence the outcome of an election.” MALDEF reviewed election returns and demographic information, and analyzed Spanish-surnamed votes cast by precinct. MALDEF concluded that the lack of success of Latino voters in electing candidates of their choice results from persistent racially polarized voting in the electorate.

The letter requests that Garden Grove officials respond to the letter by July 3, 2015. If the response is unsatisfactory, MALDEF and its clients will seek a judicial order changing the election system from at-large to by-district, along with other relief provided for in the CVRA, including costs and attorney fees.

“MALDEF, the legal arm of the Latino community, has acted to protect disenfranchised voters in Garden Grove and they have our full support” said David Rodriguez, State President, California LULAC.

The right to vote is fundamental to democracy in the U.S. and must be protected for all citizens, regardless of race. MALDEF supports equal representation for all communities across the country.

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MALDEF

Founded in 1968, MALDEF is the nation’s leading Latino legal civil rights organization. Often described as the “law firm of the Latino community,” MALDEF promotes social change through advocacy, communications, community education, and litigation in the areas of education, employment, immigrant rights, and political access.

For more information on MALDEF, please visit: www.maldef.org.