



## **Press Release**

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## **ACLU Challenges Discriminatory Wolf Point Voting Districts**

Districts enable whites to elect more school board members than Native Americans

WOLF POINT, MT — The ACLU today filed a lawsuit against Wolf Point High School District 45A in U.S. District Court on behalf of seven Wolf Point residents, challenging illegal and discriminatory Wolf Point Public Schools voting districts. The apportionment of the districts gives residents of a predominantly white voting district within the school district greater representation on the school board than residents in the predominantly Native American voting district in clear violation of the Voting Rights Act and the Fourteenth Amendment.

Wolf Point High School District 45A unites School Districts 3 and 45. With only a 2010 Census population of 430 people, District 3, with a majority white population, elects three members to the Wolf Point High School Board – one board member for every 143 residents. District 45, which is majority Native American, had a 2010 Census population of 4,205 and elects five members – 1 board member for every 841 residents.

As the voting districts stand now, each resident of majority white District 3 has far more say on the school board than each resident of majority Native American District 45.

“This clearly violates the principle of one person, one vote, and creates a school board where white members of the district are overrepresented and Native Americans are underrepresented,” said ACLU of Montana Legal Director Jon Ellingson. “The school district has an obligation under both state and federal law to redraw voting districts every 10 years based upon accurate population numbers. It’s long past time for the district to do that.”

The plaintiffs in the case – Ronald Jackson, Ruth Jackson, Robert Manning, Patricia McGeshick, Lawrence Wetsit, Bill Whitehead and Lanette M. Clark – are all Native Americans.

“It’s deeply troubling that these voting districts are so clearly discriminatory against Native Americans,” said Laughlin McDonald, an attorney with the ACLU’s National Voting Rights Project, which is assisting with the case. “This kind of situation is precisely why the Voting Rights Act has a section that allows a court that has found a constitutional violation to require a jurisdiction like Wolf Point High School District to pre-clear any voting changes and show that they are not discriminatory. In addition to fixing the current problem immediately, we’re calling for the U.S. District Court to establish preclearance for this school district to prevent such racial discrimination in the future.”

More information about the case can be found at [www.aclumontana.org](http://www.aclumontana.org).

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