



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**UCLA VOTING RIGHTS PROJECT FILES A COMPLAINT AGAINST THREE
COUNTIES IN WASHINGTON FOR DISPROPORTIONATELY DISQUALIFYING
LATINO VOTER BALLOTS**

Voting rights advocates are concerned that voters with Spanish surnames are facing discrimination during the ballot verification process in three Washington counties.

A complaint filed today alleges that three Washington counties are disqualifying mail-in ballots of Latino voters at triple the rate of other groups. The complaint was filed on behalf of the Latino Community Fund of Washington, the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), and an individual voter.

According to the UCLA Voting Rights Project and Amend Law, a local community lawyering firm that is co-counsel to the complaint, the process that Yakima, Benton and Chelan counties use to verify signatures for the elections in the 2019 and 2020 cycles resulted in a disproportionate number of ballots rejected for Latino voters and other groups with Spanish surnames.

Washington elections are done through mail-in ballots, meaning that the affected Latino voters have no other option to vote. The greater likelihood that their ballot will be rejected is a violation of their voting rights, according to the complaint.

“It became clear during the presidential election that the right to vote must be protected at the local level,” said Molly Matter, partner at Amend Law. “All voters, regardless of their surname, deserve a process that applies fair and uniform standards that uphold the right to vote.”

“We are asking the counties to revise their qualification process to remove the possibility of racially discriminatory effects,” said managing attorney and UCLA Voting Rights counsel Sonni Waknin. “Every voter deserves the right to have their ballot counted.”

During the 2020 general election, Latino voters in Yakima County were 3.9 times more likely than white voters to have their ballots rejected. During the same election, Latino voters in Chelan

County were 3.2 times more likely to have their ballots rejected for perceived signature mismatch and three times more likely in Benton County.

About the UCLA Voting Rights Project

The UCLA Voting Rights Project (UCLA VRP) is the flagship project of the UCLA Latino Policy & Politics Initiative (LPPI) at the University of California, Los Angeles 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. UCLA VRP addresses monumental and overlooked gaps in the field of voting rights, such as: how to train young lawyers and researchers, how to support the development of new legal and methodological theories for voting rights cases, and how to advance policy work to ensure that there is a new generation of leaders who are pursuing efforts to guarantee all citizens have equal and fair access to our democracy. The project was founded by Chad W. Dunn, J.D., and Matt Barreto, Ph.D.

To learn more about the UCLA Voting Rights Project, please visit <https://latino.ucla.edu/votingrights>.