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**EMBARGOED UNTIL:**  
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**VOTING RIGHTS COMPLAINT FILED WITH U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE**  
To Eric Holder: "Help people with developmental disabilities retain and regain their voting rights."

(Los Angeles) A formal complaint was filed today with the Department of Justice on behalf of thousands of Americans with intellectual and developmental disabilities who have been denied the right to vote in Los Angeles County.

The violations are occurring as judges in Probate Court administer California laws governing "limited conservatorships," which are known in other states as "adult guardianships." Parents often petition the court to appoint them as conservators so they can make legal decisions for adult sons or daughters with developmental disabilities who may lack capacity to make some financial, medical, or other decisions.

The complaint alleges that judges in the Los Angeles Superior Court are routinely violating federal law by using literacy tests, prohibited by the Voting Rights Act of 1965, to determine whether the adults should keep or be denied the right to vote. It also alleges that the judges, and the attorneys they appoint to represent clients in these cases, are violating federal laws that allow people with disabilities to have assistance in completing voter registration forms or in casting ballots.

Judges in Los Angeles process some 1,200 new limited conservatorship cases per year. Cases remain "open" until the conservatee dies. Since people with developmental disabilities often receive a conservatorship order when they turn 18, their cases may stay open for decades. During this time, they may remain disqualified from voting because they fail the literacy test imposed by court officials.

There may be 10,000 or more open limited conservatorship cases in Los Angeles County alone, with perhaps 40,000 or more open cases throughout California. A recent audit of a block of such cases in Los Angeles showed that 90% of limited conservatees had been ordered disqualified from voting.

"What is happening in Los Angeles is the tip of the iceberg," said attorney Thomas F. Coleman, who filed the complaint for the Disability and Abuse Project on behalf of limited conservatees under the jurisdiction of the Los Angeles Superior Court. "The problem of voting rights violations of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities is not isolated to Los Angeles. Such civil rights violations are occurring elsewhere in California. Indeed, this is happening in many states throughout the nation."

Dr. Nora J. Baladerian, Executive Director of the Project and a clinical psychologist in Los Angeles, emphasized that the impact on people with disabilities is not just legal and political. "Being told that you are less than other Americans and that you cannot exercise your right to vote has a detrimental emotional and psychological effect on people with disabilities," she said. "We trust that Attorney General Eric Holder will take action to protect the rights of these deserving American citizens."

(The complaint and exhibits are now available to media, but they and the story are embargoed until July 10.)