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## Plaintiffs In Voting Rights Lawsuit Applaud Worcester’s Announcement That It Will Change Method Of Electing School Committee

### City Says It Won’t Fight Lawsuit, Which Alleges Current Electoral System Illegally Dilutes The Vote Of Communities of Color

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WORCESTER – Today, the diverse coalition of Plaintiffs in a federal voting rights case challenging the City of Worcester’s method of electing its School Committee applauded the City’s announcement that it will not fight the lawsuit but will instead change to a more fair and equitable electoral system. The announcement was made by Worcester’s Mayor on Tuesday evening, following a discussion of the lawsuit by the City Council in executive session.

The lawsuit was filed earlier this year by **Worcester Interfaith**, the **NAACP, Worcester Branch**, and eight individual voters of color, who alleged that the City’s current “at large” method of electing School Committee illegally dilutes the vote of Latino/a and Black voters in Worcester. Although communities of color make up nearly half of Worcester’s population, and the student body of Worcester Public Schools is even more diverse, the School Committee is all-white and has been so for virtually all of Worcester’s history.

“We are very pleased that the City Council has committed to changing the electoral system for School Committee to a system that will provide individuals of color in Worcester an equal voice,” said **Rebecca MacDowell Lecaroz, partner at Brown Rudnick LLP**, the law firm that is representing the Plaintiffs on a *pro bono* basis along with **Lawyers for Civil Rights (LCR)**. “We look forward to working with the City to formalize the agreement in a consent decree that will lead to a new system which will ensure fair representation.”

**Isabel Gonzalez-Webster, Executive Director of Worcester Interfaith**, echoed that statement, saying “It is gratifying that the City has recognized that we need to change Worcester’s electoral system. A more fair system is necessary in order to have true representative democracy and to deliver equal educational opportunity to every Worcester Public School student.”

**Fred Taylor, President of the NAACP, Worcester Branch** added, “This is a long time coming and can’t happen soon enough. We at the NAACP are always looking for ways to eliminate systemic barriers to equal opportunity. This is another step towards equity, and all of our children will be the biggest beneficiaries of this change, which will help bring fair representation to the Worcester School Committee.”

The lawyers for both sides will now work together in the coming weeks to formalize the City’s commitment into a binding Consent Decree, said **Oren Sellstrom, Litigation Director of LCR**. Attorney Sellstrom noted that the Consent Decree that the City of Lowell entered into in 2019 following another LCR lawsuit will provide the parties with a good model, adding that by agreeing to settle the case early, Worcester will avoid the two years of litigation that Lowell endured before ultimately agreeing to change. This will help ensure prompt compliance with the federal Voting Rights Act while preserving scarce taxpayer dollars. “We look forward to working with the City of Worcester to implement change that will benefit all residents of Worcester, particularly communities of color and the diverse students who attend the Worcester Public Schools.”

The case is [\*Worcester Interfaith v. City of Worcester\*](#), No. 21-CV-40015 (D. Mass. filed Feb. 8, 2021). As detailed in the Complaint, Worcester is the second largest city in Massachusetts and second largest city in New England. Communities of color in Worcester make up nearly half of the City’s overall population (approximately 44%), with the largest minority populations being Hispanic/Latino/a (21.3%) and Black (12.1%). The student population of Worcester Public Schools, over which the School Committee presides, is even more diverse. In the 2019-2020 school year, 43.1% of students identified as Hispanic/Latino/a and 16.9% identified as Black or African American. Despite this composition and the rapid growth of the Hispanic/Latino/a and Black communities, Worcester’s six-member School Committee is all-white and with very few exceptions, has been all-white during the course of the City’s history.

Worcester is the last large city in the Commonwealth to elect its School Committee through an all at-large plurality electoral system. Other cities and towns in the Commonwealth have moved to a system that includes at least some district-based seats. In a district-based system, a city is divided into a number of districts, and residents of each of those districts vote for their own representative on the School Committee.

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