

The Virgin Islands Consortium

CrowdJustice.org Helping Raise Funds to Support Right to Vote in U.S. territories

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Plaintiffs from Guam, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico are making an appeal to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit that where you live shouldn't impact your right to vote for President. Now they will have some extra help after a new crowdfunding platform, CrowdJustice.org, has selected the case to be part of its United States launch.

CrowdJustice, originally founded in the United Kingdom in 2015, helps non-profits raise funds for public interest lawsuits. People may donate to support We the People Project's voting rights advocacy [here](#).

“We are excited to have our case selected by CrowdJustice.org, which will help bring national attention to the issue of voting rights in U.S. territories while also providing important resources to expand our advocacy,” said Neil Weare, President and Founder of We the People Project, a non-profit that advocates for equal rights and representation in U.S. territories. “The message we have for the rest of the country is that where you live should not impact your right to vote for President or have voting representation in Congress.”

We the People Project has set a target of \$10,000, which will help cover the costs of the appeal to the Seventh Circuit. Donors have until March 14th to make a pledge towards the target goal. Pledges are only converted to contributions if the target goal is met. All contributions to support the case are tax deductible, since We the People Project is a recognized 501(c)(3) organization.

Luis Segovia, the lead plaintiff, is a member of the Guam Army National Guard, serving two deployments to Afghanistan. He also was deployed to provide security during the 2005 Iraqi Elections. “Veterans and Soldiers from Guam and other U.S. Territories have pledged allegiance to the flag and fought to protect and defend our country only to be denied the right to vote,” Mr. Segovia said. Also serving as plaintiffs in Guam are Anthony Bunten, also a Veteran, and the Iraq, Afghanistan and Persian Gulf Veterans of the Pacific. Guam attorney Leevin Camacho, who is co-counsel in the case, added, “Residents of Guam have been denied the right to vote and the right to meaningful representation in the federal government for more than 115 years.”

Pamela Colon, a criminal defense lawyer in St. Croix who is a plaintiff in the case, explained “Virgin Islanders are required to follow federal laws, shouldn’t we have a say in making those laws? Voting rights would mean having a say in who our President is, who our federal judges are, and what laws we are required to follow.” Also serving as plaintiffs in the U.S. Virgin Islands are Lavonne Wise and the League of Women Voters for the Virgin Islands. St. Croix attorney Semaj Johnson, who is co-counsel in the case, added, “As the Virgin Islands commemorates 100 years as part of the United States, it’s about time we have the same voting rights as other Americans.”

Jose Antonio Torres, a disabled Vietnam-era Veteran living in Puerto Rico who also served for 22 years in the U.S. postal service, explained “Puerto Rican service members are equal on the battlefield, it’s time we are treated as equal at the ballot box. It’s shameful that I am treated as a second-class citizen even after spending a career in public service.” Tomas Ares, another Vietnam-era Veteran living in Puerto Rico, is also a plaintiff.

The Segovia plaintiffs are appealing a district court decision that relied on the controversial Insular Cases to hold for the first time that the right to vote is not a “fundamental right” in U.S. territories. In doing so, it upheld federal and state laws that allow former state residents to continue voting for President by absentee ballot if they live in the Northern Mariana Islands, American Samoa, or a foreign country, but not Guam, the U.S. Virgin Islands, or Puerto Rico. All case filings are available at <http://www.equalrightsnow.org/segovia>.