

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Supreme Court Denies Review In VI Case; Federal Officials Defend Disenfranchisement In U.S. Territories Before Human Rights Commission

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This morning, the U.S. Supreme Court [denied review](#) in [Segovia v. United States](#), a lawsuit seeking to expand voting rights in U.S. territories, according to a release Equally American, a nonprofit organization that advocates for equality and civil rights for the nearly 4 million Americans who live in U.S. territories, announced Tuesday afternoon.

The lawsuit was brought by Equally American on behalf of a group of veterans and others living in Guam, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands who would be able to vote for President and have voting representation in Congress if they lived in any *other* U.S.

territory or even a foreign country but cannot based on discriminatory federal and state overseas voting laws.

On Friday, federal officials defended the continued disenfranchisement of millions of U.S. citizens living in the territories in a hearing before the InterAmerican Commission on Human Rights ([IACHR](#)) in [Rossello v. United States](#).

Supreme Court Denies Review in *Segovia v. United States*

“Last week, nearly 4 million disenfranchised Americans living in U.S. territories could only watch from the sidelines as a new Supreme Court Justice was confirmed to the Court. Today, that same Court denied review of our lawsuit seeking to expand voting rights in U.S. territories. This timing paints in stark relief the undemocratic nature of justice for Americans in the territories – 98% of whom are racial or ethnic minorities,” said Neil Weare, president and founder of Equally American.

“Absent full enjoyment of the right to vote, Americans in the territories are too easily ignored by all three branches of the federal government. That’s why if we are to bring an end to this second class citizenship it is more important than ever that we raise the voices of not just the nearly 4 million citizens living in U.S. territories but also the over 5 million strong territorial diaspora who do enjoy the right to vote. Our voices must become so strong that we can no longer be ignored,” Mr. Weare added.

“In the coming weeks and months, Equally American will be considering next steps for expanding voting rights in U.S. territories. As we do that, we’d like to hear from you,” he said. “If you live in a U.S. territory and would like to be able to vote for President in 2020, please take our Right to Vote survey.”

Equally American’s Right to Vote survey is available online at http://www.equalrightsnow.org/right_to_vote_survey.

United States Defends Denial of Voting Rights Before Human Rights Commission

On Friday, the United States defended the denial of voting rights in U.S. territories before the InterAmerican Commission on Human Rights during its hearing in *Rossello v. United States*, a case arguing that disenfranchisement in Puerto Rico violates America’s international law commitments to democratic participation. Equally American filed an amicus brief in the case on behalf of current and former elected officials from Guam, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and the Northern Mariana Islands. A full video of the hearing is available [here](#).

“It was surreal to watch federal officials actually argue that residents of U.S. territories are not denied meaningful political participation in the federal government because they can vote in presidential primaries, can vote for a non-voting Congressperson, or can move to one of the fifty states and vote there,” said Mr. Weare. “This kind of reasoning not only defies logic, but it insults the dignity of U.S. citizens living in the territories.”

While there is no set timeline for a decision, one is expected before the presidential elections in 2020.

Rosselló v. United States follows [Statehood Solidarity Committee v. United States](#), a similar case filed by advocates for equal rights in the District of Columbia in which the

Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ruled in 2003 that the denial of voting representation in Congress for residents of D.C. violated the United States' international law commitments. The Commission's ruling in this earlier case could foreshadow how the Commission rules ultimately rules in *Rossello*.

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