

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF COLORED PEOPLE
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BRUCE S. GORDON
President & Chief Executive Officer

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Chairman, Board of Directors

March 2, 2006

Attorney General Alberto Gonzales
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20530-0001

Dear Attorney General Gonzales:

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) strongly urges the U.S. Department of Justice to enhance the State of Louisiana's election plan for New Orleans that will undoubtedly place a severe burden on African American voters displaced by Hurricane Katrina. Moreover, your office should also impress this point of view upon the United States Federal District Court of Appeals in any appeal that may be taken from the recent federal district court's decision allowing the scheduled April elections to go forth.

Given the unfortunate history of voting in the State of Louisiana, and the multitude of successful litigation there which had to be brought by civil rights plaintiffs in redressing Louisiana's historical and ongoing violations of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the NAACP furthermore strongly encourages the Justice Department to closely review the plan that has been ordered by the court and oversee its implementation to ensure that minority voters will have a fair opportunity to vote and also have their votes counted in the upcoming elections. In particular, the Justice Department should address the serious problem of mail delivery in the jurisdiction.

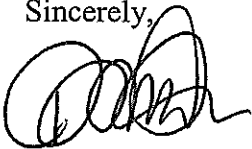
Even though Secretary of State Al Ater's plan includes, a revised list of polling places, the buying of television ads, publishing newspaper notices and mailing letters to New Orleans evacuees who applied for federal emergency aid, the NAACP is gravely concerned that the list provided by FEMA of evacuees who applied for federal emergency aid is not adequately reliable to protect displaced residents' constitutional right to vote. Our research shows that as much as 66% of those displaced are outside of Louisiana. New Orleans Parish lost up to 48% of its voting population and 75% of these displaced voters are African American. Since Hurricane Katrina struck on August 29, 2005, residents of New Orleans have likely moved several times since initially requesting federal emergency aid from FEMA. The Justice Department should not pre-clear any satellite voting plan that does not maximize the voter participation of displaced residents.

The State of Louisiana must take additional and extraordinary efforts to fully devise a plan for setting up and implementing effective absentee ballot measures, including satellite voting booths in Louisiana cities with large concentrations of displaced residents as well as in surrounding states where displaced Louisiana residents have temporarily relocated. This is advisable and absolutely necessary in our view because of the difficulty many of the displaced residents will have in returning to New Orleans and other Louisiana cities in order to vote. It is clear to us the difficulty election officials will have in securing accurate addresses for many of the displaced residents in order to send information to them regarding the procedures for casting an absentee ballot.

New Orleans citizens' right to vote must be protected and the State of Louisiana must carry this burden to your office's satisfaction. Your office's leadership in this crisis is crucial and we thus urge you to not abdicate your office's high responsibility in guaranteeing the adoption of a final plan that is free of racial discrimination. The U.S. Department of Justice must seek the courts' agreement that Louisiana must sufficiently locate all of the displaced residents, properly educate them and also election officials on their rights and responsibilities, and implement a plan which will adequately protect minority voting rights.

As we approach extending the Voting Rights Act, the present situation in New Orleans offers instructive examples and speaks volumes as to why the NAACP vigorously supports extending the Act. Undoubtedly we will face the same issues we have raised above in the November elections. We hope that you will use your good offices to set matters right at this early opportunity. Please let me know if the United States Department of Justice will comply with this request. As time is of the essence, I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bruce S. Gordon', written over a circular stamp or seal.

Bruce S. Gordon
NAACP President & CEO

BSG/kdp