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News Release

For Immediate Release

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Civil Rights Groups Sue Secretary of State for Voting Rights Violations Affecting People with Disabilities, Low-Income Californians

(Sacramento, CA – July 24, 2018) Today, Disability Rights California (DRC) and the American Civil Liberties Union Foundation of Northern California sued Secretary of State Alex Padilla for failing to provide voter registration services for low-income Californians and Californians with disabilities.

DRC and the ACLU argue that Secretary Padilla has failed to designate state and local offices that serve more than 7 million Californians as “Voter Registration Agencies” (VRAs), as required under the National Voter Registration Act (NVRA) and California’s Elections Code.

The lawsuit demands that California comply with state and federal laws that require public assistance offices and state-funded programs primarily engaged in providing services to persons with disabilities to offer voter

registration services to applicants and clients at all of their offices in the state.

"People with disabilities are underrepresented as registered voters," said Alice Chiu, consumer rights program director for Senior & Disability Action and a plaintiff in the case. "We are a big and diverse group, and need more opportunities to register to vote, and more locations offering voter registration and assistance."

Today's complaint follows years of advocacy by ACLU and DRC, and a [demand letter](#) sent in June to Secretary Padilla, calling for increased access to voter registration services for low-income Californians and Californians with disabilities. DRC and the ACLU's [analysis of NVRA data](#) reveals widespread deficiencies in California. The analysis shows that the state is systematically failing to provide voter registration services to people with disabilities. State programs that should offer voter registration services but are not currently designated as VRAs include Local Educational Agency special education offices, Local Area Agencies on Aging, California Department of Education's Nutrition Programs financial aid programs administered by the California Student Aid Commission and county General Assistance programs.

"Millions of low-income Californians and Californians with disabilities continue to face barriers to voter registration because of Secretary Padilla's inaction," said Shilpi Agarwal, staff attorney with the ACLU Foundation of Northern California. "California has a legal and ethical obligation to provide these individuals with necessary voter registration assistance, just like it does for the people who visit their local DMV."

"Many people with disabilities do not have contact with the DMV," said Paul Spencer, voting rights attorney with Disability Rights California, "Disability service programs that also serve as voter registration agencies are crucial access points to our democracy for persons who are blind, deaf, or have other disabilities."

The lawsuit was filed in the Superior Court of the State of California in the County of San Francisco.

Disability Rights California is a non-profit organization founded in 1978. We protect the rights of people with disabilities. Visit disabilityrightsca.org.