

# MISSOURI NAACP v. FERGUSON-FLORISSANT SCHOOL DISTRICT

## MEET THE PLAINTIFFS



### MISSOURI NAACP

For nearly a century the Missouri NAACP has worked to ensure the political, educational, social and economic equality of rights of all persons and to eliminate racial hatred and racial discrimination.

“The Voting Rights Act guarantees African-Americans the right to fully participate in the electoral process and this litigation is about ensuring equal opportunity to participate,” said Adolphus Pruitt, first vice president, legal redress chair, Missouri NAACP.

### REDDITT HUDSON



Redditt Hudson is the regional field organizer for Region IV of the NAACP, board chair of The Ethics Project and a former program associate for the American Civil Liberties Union of Eastern Missouri. He previously served as an officer with the St. Louis Police Department. He has been a Ferguson-Florissant School District resident nearly 15 years. His daughters, high school students, have been enrolled in the Ferguson-Florissant district since preschool.

“What we’ve seen is the inability of blacks to elect people from their own communities who will then give voice to their concerns...Local elections have clearly affected recent events in Ferguson. We need people in positions of leadership who are connected to the people they serve, and who will acknowledge the lived reality of people and their injuries, especially the black community in Ferguson,” said Hudson.

### REV. WILLIS JOHNSON



Rev. Johnson is the pastor of Wellspring Church, located in Ferguson, Missouri. He is a member of the Ferguson Human Rights Commission. In April 2014, he ran for Ferguson-Florissant School District Commissioner. Rev. Johnson holds a B.S. in Secondary Education, as well as a Master of Divinity and a Doctorate in Ministry.

“How districts or constituencies are comprised or drawn affects the outcome [of our elections]...Race definitely affects educational opportunity in this area. I recently participated in the school board election as both a voter and a candidate. Diversity of representation and leadership throughout the district was and remains one of my top concerns,” said Rev. Johnson.

Visit [ACLU-MO.org/Voting-Rights-Lawsuit](https://www.aclu-mo.org/Voting-Rights-Lawsuit) for more information.

## FACT SHEET

### What is the problem?

The electoral system of the Ferguson-Florissant School District effectively locks African-American voters out of the political process.

The Ferguson-Florissant School District's voting age population is 47 percent Black, and the District's student body is 77 percent Black. Yet, only two out of seven members of the School Board are Black. One of which was elected after the start of this litigation.

### How are School Board Members currently elected?

The current voting system in the School District elects members on an "at-large" basis from the School District as a whole. This means that Board members are elected by voters from throughout the School District, instead of each member representing a different neighborhood. This at-large system essentially allows the majority to pick all School Board members, depriving the minority of a voice on the Board.

### Why is the current voting system illegal under the law?

The federal Voting Rights Act prohibits jurisdictions such as the Ferguson-Florissant School District from "vote dilution" which is the use of an electoral scheme—such as at-large elections—that weakens the voting strength of minority communities, and consequently denies those voters an equal opportunity to elect candidates of their choice.

### How are students hurt by this?

The Ferguson-Florissant School District has a history fraught with discrimination against African-Americans. The District, which spans several municipalities, was created by a 1975 desegregation order intended to remedy the effects of discrimination against African-American students.

Inequity in education is still rampant. Among students attending the same school, African-American students are grossly underrepresented in advanced courses and college readiness programs, but are overrepresented in special education classes and in school disciplinary matters. Elected officials in the Ferguson-Florissant School District must be responsive to the educational needs of all students.

### What is the NAACP asking for?

Our lawsuit is asking for an electoral system in which each school board member is elected from an individual neighborhood voting district (a "single-member district"). This would give Black voters an equal opportunity to elect their preferred candidates, and ensure that every community has a voice on the School Board.



**FOR MORE INFORMATION:**

[ACLU-MO.org/Voting-Rights-Lawsuit](https://www.aclu-mo.org/Voting-Rights-Lawsuit)

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