

10 Things to Know about At-Large Voting in Lowell and the Voting Rights Lawsuit

(In All At-Large elections everyone is elected citywide)

1 Problems with All At-Large Elections

- The voting method allows 51% of the voters to win all the seats. 51% works in a race when voting for only one winner for state legislature or Congress. But when many seats are elected at once- as for the Lowell City Council (9) and School Committee (6) - the result should be more representative of the whole city.
- One or two neighborhoods can win all the seats. Many voters and neighborhoods can end up without direct representation.
- All At-Large voting can be illegal under the Voting Rights Act meant to ensure that minority voters, and voters in general, have a fair opportunity to elect candidates of their choice.

2 What's the purpose of a lawsuit?

- To have the federal court as a neutral mediator for the sides to present and discuss the facts of the case.
- For the plaintiffs and the city to agree on a remedy that provides voters a more equal opportunity for all voters and neighborhoods.

3 Why would district elections provide better opportunity?

District elections provide more opportunity for all voters to:

- Elect someone that lives in their own neighborhood and shares similar experiences and concerns.
- Meet and get to know the candidates running in their local district and not citywide.
- Have better access after the election to a local representative who has campaigned in their area and lives in that neighborhood.
- Allow new candidates a better chance to run and get known in a neighborhood-based district rather than citywide.

4 Are there advantages to At-Large seats?

- A citywide view point to the table can be a benefit. Still, the large majority of seats need to be based in districts to ensure fairness and representation across the city.

5 What do other Massachusetts cities do?

- No other city over 100,000 people uses all-at-large election. Almost every large Massachusetts City uses a system that is all or mainly neighborhood-based districts with some at-large seats.

10 Things to Know about At-Large Voting in Lowell and the Voting Rights Lawsuit

6 Is the problem voter turnout?

- We all want higher voter turnout. But that is not the main problem. It's the underlying math of All At-Large voting that let's one bloc of voters control most or all of the seats. This is why:
 - The federal government banned this method for federal elections.
 - Most states discourage at-large voting. Alabama, one of the last states to use judicial elections, is now facing a similar lawsuit under the Voting Rights Act.
 - All-At-Large voting is no longer used in all larger Mass. and U.S. cities

7 How long does a voting rights lawsuit take?

- If the federal district court agrees to move forward, it can take up to a year or more. The city and plaintiffs can come to an agreement subject to court approval at any time.

8 What is the Voting Rights Act?

- The Voting Rights Act was passed by Congress in 1965 to ensure minority voters – and by extension all voters - have an equal opportunity under the law to elect representatives of their choice. It covers any minority population large enough to conduct appropriate analysis for a claim.

9 Who is filing the lawsuit?

- The Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights of Boston on behalf of Asian American and Latino plaintiffs who are eligible voters in Lowell.

10 What it a lawsuit won't do?

- It won't affect this year's 2017 city election.
- It doesn't change Lowell's Plan E form of government with a city manager and a mayor elected from the city council.
- It doesn't guarantee what candidates might win. It provides more equal opportunity for voters to elect their own neighborhood candidates across the city representing the city Lowell is today.