

Headline: Spectrum Institute to File a Class-Action Complaint with the DOJ to RESTORE the Voting Rights of Thousands with Disabilities in California

Press Conference: Tuesday, August 23rd 10am

Location: Outside of the U.S. Attorney's Office – 880 Front Street, San Diego

Participants: David Rector and his supporters; disability rights advocates

On New Year's Day 2016 a new state law went into effect in California which affirms the right to vote for thousands of seniors and people with disabilities. If they can express their desire to vote, they have the right to vote. The problem? Unless immediate action is taken, thousands of eligible California voters are going to be watching November's election results on television knowing they were prevented from voting because of California officials previously disqualified them from voting – in violation of federal voting rights laws.

Take the case of San Diego resident David Rector. David, who is a quadriplegic, acquired a condition known as "locked-in syndrome" after suffering a massive stroke in 2009. He can think, feel, comprehend, remember, see, hear, and express emotions but cannot move his limbs functionally. He was a producer for National Public Radio before his illness. He was able to vote in 2010 with assistance but was stripped of that voting right by a local official in 2011.

David is going to court on Tuesday, to request that his voting rights be restored IMMEDIATELY.

David Rector's story is not unique. Spectrum Institute filed a complaint in July 2014 with the Department of Justice alleging that California officials had violated federal voting rights laws. The DOJ opened an inquiry in May 2015 which is ongoing. That investigation is statewide and implicates the voting rights of tens of thousands of seniors and people with disabilities.

The California legislature worked to correct the problem and passed the new state law (SB 589). However, seniors and people with disabilities who have also lost their voting rights as David did are unaware of the new law and government officials are slow to restore their voting rights.

This is why on Tuesday, August 23, Spectrum Institute is filing a new class action complaint with the DOJ. They want that agency to press the State of California to speed up the voting rights restoration process. After the complaint is filed, David and his supporters will walk to court where David will say "I want to vote" with the aid of his electronic voice. It is those four magic words that trigger the duty of the State of California to restore his voting rights.

Spectrum Institute estimates there are 30,000 or more Californians like David who lost their right to vote in previous years and who are eligible to ask for that right to be restored under SB 589. But they must be registered to vote by October 24 or they will be watching the election returns rather than helping to shape those results with their own vote. People with disabilities should have the same right to vote as every other American. What happens in California will have ramifications in other states with laws that disqualify many people with disabilities from voting. ###

Thomas F. Coleman is the legal director of Spectrum Institute – a nonprofit organization advocating for equal rights and justice for people with disabilities. www.spectruminstitute.org/votingrights