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Letter to Ms. Patricia Ito from Willie Houseal, 1983 January 10

Houseal, Willie H.

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WINNERSVILLE COALITION CONSULTANTS
811 Bunche Street
Valdosta, GA 31601

10 January 1983

Ms. Patricia Ito
Voting Rights Division
Department of Justice
Washington, DC 20531

Dear Ms. Ito:

For sometime our organization, Winnersville Coalition Consultants has been concerned about our community not being able to elect blacks to public posts in the Valdosta/Lowndes County area.

We feel that a change from our present system of election to a (Ward) district structured system would greatly increase, and in some areas insure the election of blacks to public office.

To change the present At-Large System, both in the past and present has been fruitless. Law suits have been initiated against Lowndes County Commissioners, members of Valdosta City Council, Board of Elections and Board of Education. In general, the suits asked for voting by districts and changing the board of elections. Adding to the efforts are voters and citizens of Lowndes County, Georgia, endorsing to the fullest this action.

Although these attempts have been made by various citizens and organizations, the Justice Department and local and state government officials have failed to realize that Lowndes County and the City of Valdosta have problems that are far too obvious to be overlooked.

I can assure you that if there is an investigation by the Justice Department, the findings would warrant violations of the 14th, 15th and 19th Amendments of the United States Constiution.

As a potential candidate for City Council, I feel it would be a waste of time and money to run for office if the present At-Large System remains as is.

The reasons I feel that fair representation has not prevailed can be sited by names and dates of the candidates who have run for political offices in the past, but were defeated as the results of the At-Large Voting System. They are as follows:

1. 1968 T. Reid Lawrence and Rev. W.H. Hall defeated in the election for Board Post 7 and 8 - county wide

2. 1970 Rev. W.H. Hall and Dr. L.W. Williams defeated in the election for Board Posts 1 and 2 - county wide
3. 1972 Dr. L.W. Williams defeated for Post 2 - city wide
4. 1974 Dr. L.W. Williams defeated in the election for Post 8 - city wide
5. 1975 Willie Rayford and Chester Clark defeated in the election for Distric Representative - state wide
6. 1976 Clayton Barron defeated for Board Post 3 - city wide
7. 1976 Cora Howell defeated in the election for Board Post 2 - county wide
8. 1976 Thelma Branaham defeated in the election for City County Post 6 - city wide
9. 1977 Joseph Brown and Curtis Copeland defeated in the election for Board Posts 8 and 9 - city wide
10. 1978 Arthur Hart defeated in the election for Board Post 5 - city wide
11. 1978 William Pompey defeated in the election for City Council Post 4 - city wide
12. 1978 Alvin Payton, Sr. defeated in the election for City Council Post 6 - city wide
13. 1980 William Pompey defeated in the election for City Council Post 4 - city wide

It should be noted that the black population comprises 34% of all Valdosta residents and 46% of both county and city residents. Only 19% of the total black population is registered to vote. One could very well see the reasoning behind increasing the value of the black vote, thus allowing the vote to actually prove significant when all the votes are counted. When this is done, then blacks can benefit from the deomcratic process promised by the Constitution.

Blacks are unable to elect board and city representatives in the interests of black citizens because of the At-Large numbered post majority vote election requirement, the occurrence of racial voting pattern and present racial discrimination.

The rights of black voters are illegally diluted and blacks are denied equal access to the political process. In the enclosed package of information, you will find that a number of annexations have been allowed by the city's administration, thus proving for one, that the north precincts (predominately white) are strengthening its voting power, while on the other hand, this process has continously diluted the well established black vote in the predominately black precincts. However, the conditions related to politics separate from the everyday life styles of those residing in Lowndes County and the City of Valdosta.

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Those persons elected to various posts and boards historically have been unresponsive to the interests of black citizens because of the At-Large numbered posts, and majority vote election requirements.

During the 1982 Primary Election, the ballot called for expanding the Lowndes County Commission from 3 to 5 members. This issue would have lead to establishing wards and districts, thus allowing a greater chance for one (1) or two (2) minority(ies) to be elected. In addition to this assumption, a Referendum was held in 1981 with regards to the Ward System. Fifty-five (55) per cent of the voters favored a change from At-Large to wards and districts. The "straw ballot" in itself should have been sufficient for the change. However, the attitudes in the 1982 Primary Election were slightly changed due to various influences, including elected officials who encouraged citizens to vote "NO" to the Ward and District Voting System. Newspaper ads and articles are also enclosed to verify these accusations.

Given the above facts, a follow-up appeal to the Justice Department is in order. Furthermore, we request that an investigation be initiated immediately.

Sincerely,

Willie H. Houseal
Executive Director
Winnersville Coalition Consultants
Vice President NAACP - Valdosta Chapter

WHH
Enclosures