

## ISLIP TOWN

# Residents try to stop election

### Brentwood group wants new system to include Latinos

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A group of Brentwood residents and community groups is seeking to halt upcoming elections for Islip Town Board positions until an election system they say prevents Latinos from having equal representation is overhauled, according to court documents.

Six plaintiffs in a lawsuit against Islip Town and the Suffolk Board of Elections have filed for a preliminary injunction, asking a federal judge to stop future at-large elections, in which candidates are elected by a townwide majority, the documents show.

“For too long, our Latino members in Islip have been denied fair representation,” Eliana Fernandez of Make the Road New York, one of the plaintiff groups, said in a statement. “We cannot let another election go by under a system that deprives them of the right to be heard.”

Plaintiffs — Ana Flores; her father, René Flores; María Magdalena Hernández, and Magali Roman, and advocacy groups Make the Road New York and New York Communities for



**Attorney Frederick K. Brewington, wearing tie, with plaintiffs Maria Magdalena Hernández, left, Magali Roman, René Flores, Ana Flores.**

Change — filed a lawsuit in federal court in June. They allege the at-large system violates the Voting Rights Act and are seeking to create councilmanic districts with at least one ward that has a Latino majority. They have proposed four total districts in Islip.

Five town government positions are up for election in November: supervisor, clerk, tax receiver and two council members, according to town spokeswoman Caroline Smith, who otherwise declined to comment, citing pending litigation.

A representative for the board of elections was not available for comment Monday.

Frederick K. Brewington, an attorney for the plaintiffs, said they filed for the injunction motion after state lawmakers moved primaries up from September to June.

“We want to vindicate and preserve voting rights,” he said.

The at-large voting system dilutes votes by Latino residents, who represent about a third of the town’s population but have never held town office, the lawsuit said. Few elected town officials have lived in largely Latino areas of Brentwood, Central Islip or North Bay Shore, even though they are the town’s most populous hamlets.

The lack of political power has also led to discrimination and substandard town services in Latino areas, the lawsuit said.

Islip would be divided into northwest, southwest, central and eastern districts of about equal population sizes under proposals by sociology professor Andrew A. Beveridge of Queens College and the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. Beveridge

was retained by the plaintiffs to draw the four-district plan, according to court documents.

One district would include Brentwood, North Bay Shore and a sliver of Central Islip. Another would include Bay Shore, Brightwaters, Islip and West Islip. Central Islip, Hauppauge and Great River would be part of a district. A fourth district would include Oakdale, Sayville, Ronkonkoma and Bohemia. Islip’s Fire Island communities would vote either in the southwest district or the central district.

Plaintiffs would rather prevent an election that does “irreparable harm” than cause confusion if election results are voided if the lawsuit is successful, the injunction motion said. The town would “face almost no hardship at all” because town government operations would continue under the current town board, the motion said.

Judges have previously granted injunctions in similar voting rights cases in New York, including against Albany County in 2003 and the Village of Port Chester in 2007. Several similar lawsuits against at-large election systems have been successful, including in the Town of Hempstead, which fought a 12-year legal battle that ended with a U.S. Supreme Court decision.

A hearing is scheduled for April 9 at the U.S. District Court in Central Islip.