

# Latinos, Islip Town Reach Tentative Settlement in Federal Voting Rights Case



Islip Town and Latino residents who say they face discrimination in town politics reached a tentative settlement on Friday of a federal lawsuit seeking to overturn the town's at-large council election system.

A lawyer for Islip Town announced the settlement in court, but terms were not disclosed.

U.S. District Court Judge Gary R. Brown, ruling in Central Islip, held virtual conferences for 90 minutes with lawyers for the town and plaintiffs before announcing he would take several days to review proposed settlement terms.

The case, Flores v. Islip, will reconvene Tuesday, Brown said.

An Islip Town spokeswoman and Hempstead lawyer Frederick K. Brewington, who represents plaintiffs, declined to comment.

The agreement was announced after seven days of testimony in the nonjury trial.

Brentwood residents and two advocacy groups had sued Islip last year, alleging that at-large council elections violated the federal Voting Rights Act by effectively making it impossible for Latino residents to win town board seats.

Latinos said lack of representation contributed to disparities in household incomes, police protection, health care and education. They cited as an example the discovery in 2014 of illegal dumping at Roberto Clemente Park in Brentwood, which led to the temporary closure of that park.

Hispanics, who make up about one-third of Islip Town's population, also have been disproportionately affected by the coronavirus pandemic, Brewington said.

Islip's four council members all are white. The only minority elected Islip Town official in recent decades was the late Republican Joan Johnson, a Black woman who served as town clerk from 1991 to 2007.

Expert witnesses called by Brewington testified that Hispanics face political disadvantages in Islip because most of the town's population is concentrated in predominantly white communities.

Washington, D.C., attorney Louis Fisher, representing the town, countered in his opening argument on Sept. 30 that Islip Latinos were an "American success story," with higher average incomes than Hispanics elsewhere in the country.

