

Opening Arguments Begin in Case That Alleges Islip's Voting System is Discriminatory

Opening arguments were made Wednesday in a federal lawsuit filed by Latino residents who argue that the current election system in the Town of Islip discriminates against them.

Make the Road New York and New York Communities for Change, which represent Latino communities, say the current voting system does not work. The lawsuit is trying to change how town board members are elected.

Like many towns on Long Island, Islip uses at-large voting, which means the whole town together votes for members of the board. Make the Road says this has ensured that the town board has been made up of predominantly white members.

The group wants to change it to an in-district system, which would split the town up into different wards, and then voters could elect town board members by district. They say that way would make sure all Islip communities can be represented.

"If the people think there should be some mix in the board, by all means let somebody stand up and see if they can get nominated," says Anthony Mascolo, of Islip Terrace.

"Other people, they don't know the struggles, how other people feel like Spanish people, Black folks. So maybe there's a need for change," says Angela Vera, of Bay Shore.

A spokesperson for the Town of Islip says it's the town's policy not to comment on ongoing litigation.

Currently, three of Long Island's 13 towns have in-district voting.

Thirty years ago, a Hempstead resident sued the Town of Hempstead, and ultimately it established council districts. That resident, Dorothy Goosby, is now the town's senior councilmember.