



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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ACLU Lawsuit Against Fresno County Registrar

FRESNO—In response to a decision by the Fresno County Registrar’s Office to close and reassign the polling place at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Fresno in the 2018 General Election, the ACLU Foundation of Northern California has sued the Registrar’s Office for a violation of free speech.

The Fresno County Democratic Party, in a press release issued Nov. 3, 2018, detailed our concerns about the decision of the Registrar’s Office to move the polling site from the UU Church for its stated reason that some parties found the “Black Lives Matter” signage at the church objectionable.

By the county’s own admission, the signage did not violate any election laws, and yet the church still lost its polling place status. At the time, the county’s FAQ Web site said that displaying a message of “Down With Liberals” would be acceptable as it doesn’t “advocate voting for or against a particular candidate or measure,” and yet the simple statement that “Black Lives Matter” is somehow more political and more objectionable? Moreover, the sign at the UU Church is well outside the 100-foot zone for restricted campaign activity.

“What a contradiction,” said Michael D. Evans, chair of the Fresno County Democratic Party. “In the current bizarre world of duplicitous doublespeak, this is somehow OK? A live person wearing a ‘Down With Liberals’ t-shirt or a ‘MAGA’ hat is far more threatening and intimidating than a factual sign that is not even close to a polling site.”

The ACLU lawsuit is seeking an order that would prevent the Registrar’s Office from disqualifying the church as a voting location because of the “Black Lives Matter” signage on its property.

“Local registrars are at the front lines of democracy and have a critical responsibility in conducting elections fairly,” said Mollie Lee, a senior attorney with the ACLU Foundation of Northern California. “It is important for them to fulfill that responsibility in a way that is not influenced by implicit or explicit bias.”

“We applaud the commitment of the ACLU toward ensuring a fair electoral process that respects our right to free speech,” says Evans. “We urge the Fresno County Registrar’s Office to admit this error in judgment and to prioritize First Amendment considerations in all aspects of its interactions with the community.”

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