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PRESS RELEASE

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**U.S. SUPREME COURT DECISION CREATES
NEW BARRIER TO ELECTION OF LATINOS**

MALDEF calls for Congressional review and action

WASHINGTON, DC – In a sharply split decision today, the United States Supreme Court in Bartlett v. Strickland closed the courthouse doors to many Latinos and other minority communities who face discrimination with regard to voting. This decision, over the dissent of four Justices, severely weakens these minority groups' ability to utilize the Voting Rights Act to challenge election districts that strip these communities of the opportunity to elect representatives of their choice.

“This decision leaves many minority voters unprotected against electoral systems that would dilute their voting strength. It contradicts the language and intent of the Voting Rights Act. Just as Latino voting strength is growing and we are poised to have a greater effect on elections nationwide, this decision undermines the ability of courts to protect against voting systems that would discriminate,” said Nancy Ramirez, MALDEF Western Regional Counsel.

The ruling in Bartlett v. Strickland requires that the minority voting age population of a district must now potentially exceed 50% in order for minority groups to use Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act to challenge a new district that would impair their ability to elect a representative of their choice. The Court disallowed a North Carolina State House district that had a 39.4% African American population and had elected a candidate who represented that community. The district was challenged because it violated a state law that required districts to cover whole counties. The Court ruled that African Americans were powerless to use Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act to protect the district because there were not enough African Americans in the district to meet the new 50% standard.

“The Supreme Court decision, if left unchecked, will make redistricting in 2011 and the cause of making districts reflect emerging Latino electoral strength much harder, just as the Latino community is growing and gaining political power,” continued Ramirez. “That is why we are asking Chairman Patrick Leahy and Chairman John Conyers of the U.S. Senate and House Judiciary Committees to conduct hearings into the decision and recommend amendments to the Voting Rights Act to restore its traditional meaning and allow future challenges to discriminatory districts.”

Founded in 1968, MALDEF, the nation's leading Latino legal civil rights organization, promotes and protects the rights of Latinos through litigation, advocacy, community education and outreach, leadership development, and higher education scholarships. For more information on MALDEF, please visit: www.maldef.org