



NEWS RELEASE

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NALEO Mourns Loss of Voting Rights Pioneer Joaquin Avila

Known as the father of the California Voting Rights Act, Avila was a top litigator and advocate who worked to protect the rights of Latinos

Washington, D.C. – *The National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO) today released a statement following the passing of leading voting rights attorney and advocate Joaquin Avila:*

“NALEO joins the Golden State and legal community nationwide in mourning the passing of Joaquin Avila. Known as the father of the California Voting Rights Act, Avila was a brilliant legal mind who was responsible for shaping the nation’s modern-day election landscape.

“A 1973 graduate of Harvard Law School, Avila began his career arguing voting rights litigation in California before moving to Texas. While in Texas, he worked for the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, rising from staff attorney to President and General Counsel.

“Witnessing first-hand many of the obstacles preventing Latinos and other underrepresented communities from having an equal voice in the political process, Avila made it his life work to push for an electoral system that would ensure local officials were accountable to all their constituents.

“Through meticulously crafted legal suits, Avila challenged election systems that functioned to disenfranchise and discriminate against underrepresented voters and their chosen candidates. He successfully argued several groundbreaking voting right cases before the U.S. Supreme Court, including the landmark federal voting rights case *Gomez v. the City of Watsonville*, in which the city’s at-large city council elections were found to dilute the voting power of Latino residents in direct violation of the federal Voting Rights Act.

“A MacArthur Genius Award winner, Avila devoted his multi-decades long career to the notion that government functions best when it is truly reflective and responsive to all its constituents. While we will miss working side-by-side with Avila in the fight to protect the right to vote for all, we know the best way to honor his legacy is by continuing our efforts to increase Latino political participation in this country. We are deeply indebted to his many contributions to the Latino community, and our thoughts and prayers are with his family, friends and loved ones at this difficult time.”

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About NALEO

The National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials is the non-partisan leadership organization of the nation's more than 6,600 Latino elected and appointed officials.