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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
July 2, 2013

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SAALT Calls Upon the New York City Board of Elections to Fully Comply with Federal Language Access Requirements for Bengali Speakers in Queens County

SAALT commends the Asian American Legal Defense & Education Fund (AALDEF) for filing a lawsuit against the New York City Board of Elections based on their failure to abide by language access laws for Bengali speaking residents in Queens County. Plaintiffs, Alliance of South Asian American Labor, Chhaya Community Development Corporation, and Nadira Khanam, came forward with these claims due to Queens County's failures in recent elections.

For the past four elections, Queens County, New York has violated federal law by failing to translate ballots and provide language access in Bengali, despite the fact that Bengali speaking voters represent a significant proportion of residents in the county. Under Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act, jurisdictions are required to provide materials in certain languages based on data from the U.S. Census Bureau. Queens County was informed on October 13, 2011 that it was required to provide such assistance in Bengali. However, it failed to meet this requirement for the Presidential Primaries, Congressional Primaries, State Primaries, and Presidential Election in 2012. In fact, Queens County was the only jurisdiction that failed to provide assistance in new languages under Section 203 in time for any of these elections. As a result, Bengali speaking residents in Queens County were denied that to which they are entitled under Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act.

“SAALT calls on the Queens County Board of Elections to remedy their failure to provide critical language assistance to South Asian voters. We know from experience that South Asian voters often face barriers to the fundamental right to vote. We are proud of South Asian voters for coming forward to report these violations of their rights and commend AALDEF for filing the lawsuit today,” said Manar Waheed, Policy Director at South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT).

AALDEF filed this lawsuit against the New York City Board of Elections on July 2, 2013. For more information on this lawsuit, please see [AALDEF statement](#).