



# NAACP

November 3, 2023

The Honorable Mike Johnson  
Speaker  
U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries  
Minority Leader  
U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Sam Graves  
Chairman  
House Transportation & Infrastructure  
Committee

The Honorable Rick Larsen  
Ranking Member  
House Transportation & Infrastructure  
Committee

Dear Speaker Johnson, Leader Jeffries, Chairman Graves, and Ranking Member Larsen:

I am writing to express strong support for H.R. 5754, introduced by Congressman Jimmy Gomez, which would name the Los Angeles U.S. Courthouse at 350 W. 1st Street in honor of Felicitas and Gonzalo Mendez. Their activism, along with four other families, culminated in the landmark 1946 case *Mendez et al v. Westminster et al* that led to the end of segregation in California schools and paved the way for *Brown v. Board of Education*.

The NAACP's connection to this case and the Mendez, Guzman, Palomino, Estrada, and Ramirez families dates back to 1946. During the original case, the NAACP sent an amicus curiae brief in support of the families and argued that school segregation was inherently unjust and unconstitutional. As Thurgood Marshall, Robert L. Carter, and Loren Miller wrote in that brief:

“Our Democracy... can only function when all of its citizens, whether of a dominant or of a minority group, are allowed to enjoy the privileges and benefits inherent in our Constitution. Moreover, they must enjoy these benefits together as free people without regard to race or color. It is clear, therefore, that segregation in our public schools must be invalidated as violative of the Constitution and laws of the United States.”<sup>1</sup>

The NAACP takes pride in our contribution to this historic case, which directly influenced Governor Earl Warren to sign a 1947 law repealing public school segregation statutes in California. Just seven years later, Warren, now Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, authored the unanimous opinion in *Brown v. Board of Education*. This landmark decision, influenced by Thurgood Marshall's compelling oral arguments as NAACP chief counsel, ended school segregation across the country.

Nearly 80 years later, we stand by our words and advocacy in the *Mendez v. Westminster* case and the advocacy of the families who fought for equal protection under the law for all children. Today, we honor their legacy in supporting this bill. We strongly believe the Felicitas and Gonzalo Mendez United States Courthouse will be an enduring testament to the movement for civil rights for all.

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<sup>1</sup> Motion and Brief for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People as Amicus Curiae, p. 31, Gonzalo Mendez et al. v Westminster School District of Orange County et al., 1946.

We urge you to pass this bill swiftly to ensure the lasting and historic impacts of the *Mendez v. Westminster* case—and the families who fought for equal rights—are permanently and publicly commemorated to inspire all Americans for generations to come.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Johnson', with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

Derrick Johnson  
President and CEO