

# **What You Need to Know About *Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians, Spirit Lake Tribe, Wesley Davis, Zachery S. King, and Collette Brown v. Howe, Secretary of State of North Dakota***

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In 2022, Native American voters, the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians, and the Spirit Lake Nation, represented by the Native American Rights Fund and the Campaign Legal Center, challenged North Dakota's 2021 legislative map. They filed the lawsuit because the new map was unfair as it did not reflect the growing Native population and made it nearly impossible for Native votes to impact elections. Tellingly, in the first election under the map, Native voters were only able to elect one legislative candidate. This was down from three in previous years and far below the six representatives they statistically should have had.

In November 2023, the federal District Court in North Dakota found the map illegally diluted the voting strength of Spirit Lake and Turtle Mountain citizens. When a fair map was used in the 2024 election, North Dakota's District 9 elected three Tribal members to the state legislature. The state appealed the court's decision.

In May 2025, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit reversed the earlier decision and allowed the discriminatory map to stand. However, the Eighth Circuit did not decide that the discriminatory map was legal. Instead, the court decided voters could not sue to enforce federal law. This ruling means that in seven states—including North Dakota—voters can no longer go to court to protect their right to vote free from racial discrimination under the Voting Rights Act. This decision is contrary to democracy and fairness. The people elected into power should not be able to rig the system to exclude certain voters from having an impact.

When elected officials draw maps that dilute the power of Native voices, and then courts say Native people can't challenge those maps, democracy breaks down. This case is not just about lines on a map—it's about whether all voters get to participate equally in democracy. Native voters have fought for generations to be heard. This ruling says that they— and any other voter subject to discrimination that violates the Voting Rights Act—can't even ask a court for help when they're silenced. The right to challenge unfair redistricting maps matters, because in a democratic system, voters choose politicians, not the other way around.

For now, the map ordered by the District Court is still in effect, and North Dakota is not allowed to use its discriminatory map. The representatives elected by Native communities were properly elected under a fair map and remain the duly elected representatives of those districts. NARF will continue to fight for that fair map and the rights of Native voters. Native voters—and all voters—deserve a system where every voice counts.

**Learn more: [vote.narf.org](https://vote.narf.org)**

**More info: <https://narf.org/cases/north-dakota-redistricting-map/>**