My name is Nora Baladerian. I am the Executive Director of the Disability and Abuse Project of Spectrum Institute.

Our Project focuses on abuse of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. We consider civil rights violations a form of abuse.

Stripping people of their voting rights diminishes a person’s self esteem, causes them emotional distress, and has an overall negative impact on their well being. They feel “less than” their age peers. They also feel bad because they see their brothers and sisters voting, but they can’t.

In addition to my advocacy role with the Project, I am also a clinical psychologist in Los Angeles. Many of my therapy clients are people with developmental disabilities.

I was shocked when Dr. Teresa Thompson told me that her son Stephen might have his right to vote taken away because of his disability. I was astounded when I learned that Stephen’s court-appointed attorney was not going to fight for his right to vote but was planning to stipulate that he should lose it.

I called my colleague and friend, Tom Coleman, and asked him to intervene. Tom is a civil rights attorney with 40 years of experience in fighting for equal rights of under-valued populations. I needed his help.

Tom did his research and then pressured Stephen’s attorney to change his position. So Stephen kept his right to vote. But Tom did more research and discovered that thousands of people with disabilities in Los Angeles have lost the right to vote – all because judges and attorneys in the conservatorship system are not obeying federal voting rights laws.

So here we are – filing this complaint with the Department of Justice on behalf of the victims of these voting rights violations. We are confident that Attorney General Eric Holder will intervene. We believe that his office will convince the Los Angeles Superior Court to reinstate the voting rights of the thousands of people who should never have lost them in the first place. We expect a victory for people with disabilities.

Nora J. Baladerian, Ph.D.