My name is Thomas F. Coleman. I am an attorney and have been involved in various equal rights and equal justice causes for some 40 years.

A few years ago, I thought my decades of advocacy were ending. But my friend Nora Baladerian would have none of that. She got me involved in equal justice for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

We were focused on issues concerning abuse of people with developmental disabilities when three different cases came our way. These three young men were involved in “limited conservatorships” which are a form of adult guardianship. They each needed extra help in navigating through life, with all of the complex financial and medical decisions that need to be made.

What these cases had in common was that each of the men was being denied justice in various ways because the Los Angeles Superior Court is operating the limited conservatorship system as an assembly line. We will eventually address all of the injustices in this system, but today we are focusing on one area that cries out for immediate attention – Voting Rights.

Teresa Thompson came to me because the system was trying to take away the voting rights of her son Stephen. I could hardly believe it. Stephen is intelligent. Yes, he has autism and has difficulties in communication. But he definitely wanted to vote and he should have that right.

I have spent more than 600 hours in the past few months investigating the limited conservatorship system. I have discovered that judges and court-appointed attorneys in the Los Angeles Superior Court are violating federal laws protecting voting rights and disability rights. They have illegally taken voting rights away from thousands of people with disabilities.

We reached out to the “powers that be” both locally and at the state level to correct this problem. Nothing has changed. So we are “making a federal case out of it.” Today we are filing a complaint with the U.S. Department of Justice. We want these past injustices to be corrected and we want the judges and court-appointed attorneys to protect, not violate, the rights of people with developmental disabilities in future cases. We want a major change in the system. It’s long overdue.

Thomas F. Coleman