

Amicus Curiae Briefs Civil Rights/Equal Rights

Discrimination – language proficiency

Case: *Alexander v. Sandoval*

Court: The Supreme Court of the United States, December 2000

Amicus Brief: National Women's Law Center

Case: Alabama, by constitutional amendment, made English the state language and the Alabama Department of Public Safety refused to accommodate those individuals who were not fluid in English in obtaining a driver's license. Maria Sandoval filed suit as a representative of the class of Alabama residents who are otherwise qualified to obtain a driver's license but cannot do so because they are not sufficiently fluent in English. Sandoval asserted claims under 42 U.S.C. §§ 1981 and 1983, the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The District Court ruled for the plaintiffs and rejected the defendant's claim that the plaintiffs lacked a private right of action to enforce Title VI's disparate impact regulations. The Eleventh Circuit affirmed the District Court's decision.

Amicus Brief: The brief states that the private right of action to enforce Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the disparate impact regulations are well-established elements of the federal civil rights enforcement scheme. The brief also argues that full private enforcement of civil rights laws is essential in order to provide equal opportunities.

CWEALF: CWEALF joined the brief because of its commitment to ending discrimination against racial and ethnic minorities and because of its belief that laws limiting opportunities to those fluent in English perpetuates discrimination against racial and ethnic minorities.

Holding: The Supreme Court reversed and remanded the case for further hearings. The Court held that there is no private right of action to enforce disparate impact regulations under Title VI of the Civil Rights Acts of 1964. The only private action suits permitted under Title VI are those based on intentional discrimination, not merely on disparate impact.