DENVER REGIONAL HEARING
(Colorado and New Mexico)

Sturm College of Law
Denver, Colorado
March 7, 2014

GUEST COMMISSIONERS
Dr. Lonna Atkeson, University of New Mexico
Dede Feldman, former State Senator, New Mexico
Rosemary Harris Lytle, President, NAACP
Colorado Montana Wyoming State Area Conference
Johhn Zakhem, President, Zakhem Law Firm

PANELISTS
Ariel Bickel, New Mexico Vote Matters
Ukiyo Choate, Director of Elections, Colorado Secretary of State Office
Matt Crane, County Clerk and Recorder, Arapahoe County
Grace Lopez-Ramirez, former Colorado State Director, Mi Familia Vota
Amber McReynolds, Director of Elections, City and County of Denver
Roman Montoya, Deputy Clerk, Bernalillo County
Nadine Padilla, Native American Voters Alliance
Sheila Reiner, County Clerk and Recorder, Mesa County
Jennifer Weddle, Chair, Colorado Indian Bar Association

PUBLIC TESTIMONY
James Johnson, Chair, NAACP Colorado Montana Wyoming State Area Conference

SUPPORTING ORGANIZATIONS (NOT EXHAUSTIVE)
Colorado Common Cause
Colorado Lawyers Committee
Common Cause New Mexico
Elections Task Force of the Colorado Lawyers Committee
Sturm College of Law, University of Denver
The Legal Center for People with Disabilities and Older People
The Sweetser Law Firm, P.C.
DENVER REGIONAL HEARING HIGHLIGHTS

From left, Commissioners Rosemary Harris Lytle, President of the Colorado/Montana/Wyoming NAACP state conference; Dr. Lonna Atkeson, University of New Mexico; Chair John Zakhem, President of Zakhem Law Firm; and Dede Feldman, former state senator for New Mexico, seated during presentations at the New Mexico hearing.

On March 7, 2014, at a National Commission on Voting Rights public hearing organized by the Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law and partners (including the Colorado Lawyers Committee), voting rights advocates and election administrators gathered at the Sturm College of Law at the University of Denver to share their experiences with initiatives to improve elections in Colorado and New Mexico, as well as ongoing voting challenges faced by Native Americans, Latinos and disabled persons.

I. Native American Voters: Intimidation and Language Barriers

Both Nadine Padilla of Native American Voters Alliance in New Mexico and Jennifer Weddle, chair of the Colorado Indian Bar Association, spoke of Native-American voters being intimidated at the polls or given wrong information about polling locations. According to Padilla, Native-American voters in New Mexico have experienced “tow trucks going into polling locations in Native communities looking for license plates numbers of people who are behind on their

Ariel Bickel, Owner of Chispa Consulting, formally with New Mexico Vote Matters dispelling myths on minority voter participation.
car or truck payments, and word will get around pretty quickly and that will discourage voters from going to the polls. In the last elections in 2012 there were reports of tires being slashed of everyone that was going to vote.”

In both states, Native voters have faced problems with translation of materials, lack of translators at the polls and limited access to polling locations. According to Weddle, “the diversity of languages spoken by Native voters and the physical seclusion of those who reside in Indian county exacerbate the acute disenfranchising effect of discriminatory voting and election practices.” Weddle went on to note that the closing of a polling location or implementation of a voting change that is not translated or communicated to Native voters can limit the ability of these communities to vote. Padilla testified that there are “22 Native nations, which has eight distinct language[s] with varying dialects between them,” in New Mexico alone. Therefore, Padilla said, translating voting terms into the Native language is often incredibly difficult, and translators are often not available at polling locations.

Amber McReynolds, Director of Elections for the City and County of Denver, speaking at the NCVR Denver regional hearing.