ACLU URGES DADE ELECTION OFFICIALS TO INCLUDE SAMPLE CREOLE BALLOTS IN COUNTYWIDE MAILING TO HOUSEHOLDS

MIAMI - In a letter sent Monday to Miami-Dade County Manager Steve Shiver, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) urged county officials to take immediate steps to mail sample English/Creole ballots and voting instructions to Haitian-American voters in Miami-Dade County.

On Friday, the county announced its decision not to include the English/Creole versions of the sample ballots in a direct mail piece sent to approximately 867,000 households in Miami-Dade County, opting to mail only English/Spanish ballots. The county plans instead to place ads featuring English/Creole sample ballots in newspapers that serve the Haitian-American community.

In a letter co-signed by ACLU of Florida Executive Director Howard Simon and Greater Miami Chapter President Lida Rodriguez-Taseff, the ACLU outlined its concerns, stating: "We do not see how it is possible to employ one program - the mailing of sample ballots and instructional materials - to one of the County's principal language communities, but not to the other ... Miami-Dade County is a trilingual community. That is one of our strengths, and County programs should reflect that reality."

ACLU officials went on to add: "As you are aware, the language issue with respect to Creole is the subject of a Consent Decree that was the result of a lawsuit filed by the U.S. Department of Justice against Miami-Dade County. In light of that, it is particularly troubling that the County believes that a different program for Spanish-speaking and Creole-speaking voters is not a problem. We urge you not view this as a matter of what may be required by any Consent Decree, but instead that you address this issue in light of what is required by considerations of fairness."

In the Oct. 28 letter, the ACLU asks the Shiver to "at a minimum," mail "English/Creole sample ballots to all households within the sixty precincts previously designated by the county as being ones in which a significant portion of the electorate is Haitian-American."
The full text of the letter to Shiver, copied to Miami-Dade Mayor Alex Penelas, Elections Supervisor David Leahy and the Miami-Dade County Commission, follows.

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