



May 4, 2018
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE --

**JEWISH FEDERATION OF GREATER NEW ORLEANS AND
ANTI-DEFAMATION LEAGUE
JOINT STATEMENT ON
2018 LOUISIANA SENATE BILL 243 REGARDING
UNANIMOUS VERDICTS IN FELONY TRIALS**

The Jewish Community Relations Council of the Jewish Federation of Greater New Orleans and the Anti-Defamation League, South Central Region enthusiastically support 2018 Louisiana Senate Bill 243, which would put to Louisiana voters a state constitutional amendment mandating that guilty verdicts in felony trials be unanimous in order to convict.

As it stands, Louisiana is one of just two states that allow guilty felony verdicts by non-unanimous juries. Both Louisiana and Oregon allow for only 10 of 12 jurors agreeing before rendering a guilty verdict in these cases, and Louisiana is alone in permitting such verdicts in homicide cases.

Moreover, our state first adopted this split verdict rule at a constitutional convention in 1898 at which the explicit purpose was “to restore the supremacy of the white race.” The move came at a time when black Louisianians had registered to vote in large numbers and were starting to serve on juries, and the state’s white majority feared that black jurors might upset the status quo. There is persuasive evidence of racial disparities in the rule’s application even to this day.

SB 243 has already passed the State Senate by the required two-thirds vote, and it must now clear the State House of Representatives by the same margin. If that occurs, the measure to mandate unanimous verdicts in felony trials would be put to the voters on the November 6, 2018 ballot.

Louisiana’s law allowing for split verdicts is a shameful holdover from the Jim Crow era and an ugly outlier in the United States. We urge the Louisiana House and the voters of this state to support SB 243 and adopt a constitutional amendment requiring unanimous juries for felony verdicts.

Henry Miller | Chair, Jewish Federation of Greater New Orleans Board of Trustees
Arnie D. Fielkow | Chief Executive Officer, Jewish Federation of Greater New Orleans
Bradley Bain | Chair, Jewish Community Relations Council
Aaron Z. Ahlquist | Regional Director, South Central Region, Anti-Defamation League