



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Allegheny County's Polling Place Consolidation Plan
Disproportionately Affects Voters of Color**

PITTSBURGH, Allegheny County (May 27, 2020) --- Several statewide voting security and voter rights organizations objected today to Allegheny County's polling place consolidation plan for the June 2 Primary Election because it disproportionately affects voters of color.

The groups, including All Voting is Local, Common Cause of Pennsylvania, Keystone Votes, New Voices for Reproductive Justice, and One Pennsylvania, sent a letter to Allegheny County Executive Rich Fitzgerald laying out their concerns, noting that some of the consolidated precincts have among the highest concentrations of African American voters in the state. At the same time, African American voters in Allegheny County account for only around 6% of all vote-by-mail requests, while white voters account for over 92% of all requests.

The groups recommended educating voters about location changes and their right to show up to vote, engaging with experts to ensure consolidated polling places practice social distancing, and committing to a process for public input if consolidation is required in the future.

A full copy of the letter sent by the organizations to the county follows:

Dear Executive Fitzgerald:

In this time of uncertainty, we, the undersigned organizations, along with allies and partners across the Commonwealth, have been dedicated to ensuring that every eligible Pennsylvania voter can cast a ballot using the method of their choice. We are particularly concerned to ensure that voters of color are not disproportionately affected by election administration decisions.

We understand the strain the Covid-19 pandemic has placed on an already stretched election administration system and recognize that there are numerous difficult decisions that are being made every day.

That being said, we strenuously object to the current plan for consolidating polling places in Allegheny County. Polling place consolidation should not be undertaken lightly and all reasonable efforts should be made to ensure that no voter who wishes to vote in person on Primary Election day is disenfranchised. The consolidation of 50 precincts into a single consolidated polling place at the Penn Hills Library is troubling on its own, but when coupled with the fact that these precincts have some of the highest concentrations of African American voters in the state, it becomes unacceptable.

The Penn Hills Library is not the only example of consolidation that will likely result in the disenfranchisement of Allegheny County voters of color. We also know that white voters are much more likely to be voting-by-mail. Based on our data, African American voters in Allegheny County account for only around 6% of all vote-by-mail requests, while white voters account for over 92% of all requests. This means that polling place consolidation issues will disproportionately affect voters of color.

We were also concerned about your comments in the recent WTAE-TV 4 (ABC) story that “there’s not going to be a lot of voters that show up to vote.” While we are aware of the low rates of turnout in primary elections, we are concerned that your comments demonstrate a lack of interest in ensuring that all eligible voters can access the ballot regardless of their choice to use the mail-in-voting option provided by Act 77.

Again, we understand that there are very real logistical challenges that you face in administering an election in the midst of a pandemic. That being said, the right to have a voice in our democracy should be freely available to every eligible voter regardless of race, access to public transportation, zip code or socio-economic status. We strongly urge you to (1) zealously educate voters about the location of their polling place and their right to show up to vote on Primary Election day on June 2; (2) engage with experts to ensure that consolidated polling places use crowd-control tactics to ensure social distancing; and (3) if consolidation is required in the future, provide for a public input process.

We appreciate your dedication to ensuring that our elections run smoothly and look forward to working with you to ensure that every eligible voter can vote.

SINCERELY,

Common Cause Pennsylvania

Keystone Votes

All Voting is Local

One Pennsylvania

New Voices for Reproductive Justice