

POLLING PLACE AND EARLY VOTING ADVOCACY

Tools to advocate for better polling places
and early voting

Valencia Richardson

Polling Place Closure and Consolidation

- ▶ Problem: Difficult to identify when and how to advocate for changes to polling place and early voting locations.
 - ▶ Consistent answer from public officials is that it's "too late"
 - ▶ Different pathways for advocating for polling place locations on Election Day vs. early voting locations
 - ▶ Understanding where the problems are takes a significant amount of time and resources

Polling Place Closure and Consolidation

- ▶ Identifying areas of concern:
 - ▶ Inadequate early voting (Caddo Parish)
 - ▶ Parishes with systemic closures
 - ▶ Places where locations are hard to identify/access
 - ▶ Places where polling locations are in unfriendly or intimidating locations

Legal Background

- ▶ Who:
 - ▶ Parish governing boards (e.g. Jefferson Parish Council, Caddo Parish Commission, EBR Metro Council) decide where all polling locations are located in every precinct. La. Stat. Ann. § 18:533. They must vote to change any polling location. La. Stat. Ann. § 18:534
 - ▶ Parish governing boards also determine emergency polling locations. La. Stat. Ann. § 18:534 (B)(1).

Legal Background

▶ Who:

- ▶ **Early voting:** Each registrar is required to hold its offices open for early voting, but may use one other branch location with the permission of the SOS. La. Stat. Ann. § 18:1309 (A)(2), (B)(1).
- ▶ The Secretary of State can also propose additional locations for each parish and submit them to the legislature for approval. La. Stat. Ann. § 18:1309.2(A).
- ▶ In practice, parish councils have been submitting resolutions to the Secretary of State and Legislature to ask for additional locations, who then decides to make the proposal to the legislature.

Legal Background

- ▶ When:
 - ▶ **Early Voting:** Best practice is four months before election according to SOS. State law only requires thirty days prior to a primary election and twenty-one days prior to a general election La. Stat. Ann. § 18:1309.
 - ▶ **Polling Places:** Can be changed at any time, except that they cannot be changed after the qualifying period begins before any election, unless there is an emergency. La. Stat. Ann. § 18:534 (B)(1).

Legal Background

- ▶ Other background laws are at play:
 - ▶ Voting Rights Act
 - ▶ Help America Vote Act, Americans With Disabilities Act (disabilities accommodations)
 - ▶ First and Fourteenth Amendments

Advocacy Toolkit

- ▶ Publish toolkit for organizers on the ground
- ▶ Pull together research, give information about the who, what, when, where, and how
- ▶ Provide best practices
- ▶ **Timeline:** Next major election where advocacy is feasible: Orleans Parish Municipal Elections in November 2021
 - ▶ Qualifying deadline is July 14-16, 2021
 - ▶ Proposed deadline for publication: May 2021
- ▶ Ideas?