



July Newsletter

THOUGHTS FROM THE DIRECTOR:

LATOYA THOMPSON, ESQ

Hello Voter Protection Partners! June was an eventful month for Mississippi. The people of Mississippi came together in large numbers to demand a new flag, and the Mississippi state legislature passed a bill to remove the Confederate emblem from our state flag in a historic referendum on the only remaining state flag to feature the Confederate insignia!

June was also an eventful month for voter protection. We have a hotline that you can call and ask questions and report incidents!

MISSISSIPPI DEMOCRATS VOTER PROTECTION HOTLINE

1-(855)-443-3020

Open Monday through Friday | 9:00 AM CT to 5:00 PM CT

Additionally, looking to November, we have been following primaries to help us strategize how to protect the vote and following legislation to help provide safe voting options.

Twenty-three states conducted primary elections this month; eleven were scheduled for an earlier date but were postponed due to COVID-19. Many of these states experienced poll worker and polling place shortages as well as increased turnout, and numerous local elections officials were unprepared. Sadly, some voters, after waiting for hours, had to exit long lines without casting a vote. In June, our team heard local elections officials' in multiple counties in Mississippi anticipating poll worker shortages and [struggling to find new polling places](#) for the June 23 Republican primary runoff after cancellations due to COVID-19. We will follow up with county elections officials this month to learn about obstacles they encountered during the June 23 primary runoff so we can prepare to address hindrances for voters prior to and on Election Day.

Additionally, we tracked House Bill 1521 through successful passage in the House and Senate. This bill expands absentee voting deadlines, allowing absentee voters more time to vote in person and by mail. We hoped for greater and additional expansions of access to voting, particularly in light of COVID; however, we recognize that election reform has been very difficult to achieve over the years in Mississippi, and so we celebrate this victory. We are proud of the legislators who support it and worked for it, our team who worked to keep voters informed of the status, content and action they could take concerning the bill, and the work of our phone bankers who helped call voters to press their elected officials for . While we hoped for some big wins, especially in light of COVID-19, we are celebratory that the bill allows some additional persons to vote by mail, a safe and secure option that requires very little contact with others and extends the deadline for in-person and mail-in ballot voting. Read more about HB 1521 [here](#). And help us get the word out by answering questions on our new hotline!

[Sign up to be a hotline volunteer here.](#)

June 2020 Primary Elections: Our Southern Neighbors Georgia and Kentucky

The primary elections that took place in June across the country taught us one key thing: Voter Protection is more important now than ever before. In states where Republican leaders have not taken the issue of COVID-19 seriously, voters headed to the polls, [in some states in record numbers](#). Some voters wore masks and others did not. Voters were not only forced to cast an in-person ballot during a national pandemic but in some cases were met with rain, long lines, and drastic wait times. Georgia's Voter Protection team received nearly 6,000 phone calls on June 9th regarding a variety of issues, such as [equipment failures, inadequate numbers of voting machines, missing poll workers, poorly trained poll workers](#), and a reduction in polling places. [Despite warnings that training and preparation would be key, local election officials in Georgia failed to deliver timely requested mail-in ballots, and deployed poll workers unfamiliar with new machines in the face of COVID-caused poll workers.](#)

Justin Clark, the Trump campaign's senior counsel said, "Make no mistake, the reduction in polling places is a result of a concerted effort by Democrats to push vote-by-mail at the expense of in-person voting." But in reality, the 2013 landmark Supreme Court case decision of *Shelby County v. Holder* gutted a key provision of the Voting Rights Act. [In that 2013 decision, the Supreme Court invalidated a decades-old "coverage formula" naming jurisdictions that had to pass federal scrutiny under the Voting Rights Act, referred to as "preclearance," in order to pass any new elections or voting laws. Those jurisdictions were selected based on their having a history of discrimination in voting.](#) The results after *Shelby* were predictable. [Voter-identification laws, which experts suggest make voting harder especially for poor people, people of color, and elderly people, have advanced in several states, and some voting laws that make it easier to register and cast ballots have been destroyed.](#) Now, seven years later because of COVID-19, we are seeing the implications of the ruling -- voter difficulties and disenfranchisement.

Georgia isn't the only state decreasing the number of polling places. Concerns about COVID-19 led Kentucky elections officials to sharply limit the number of polling places from the typical 3,700 locations to 170 locations on June 23. [One polling place was designated for the City of Louisville, a city with a population of 600,000. Republican Secretary of State, Michael Adams doesn't believe voters are being suppressed. He is fooled by the high turnout and fails to recognize the impact mail-in voting has on overall turnout.](#)

Key Takeaways

Here is the point; despite all of the challenges faced, Georgians turned out in record numbers. [There was a huge increase in ballots cast in 2018 on the Democratic side. Nearly 4 times as many votes were cast in the Georgia Democratic primary than in the 2016 primary.](#) While the surge in turnout does not excuse the irregularities at the

polls, Georgia's Secretary of State's decision to mail every registered voter an application to vote absentee made a difference.

The same can be said in Kentucky, more absentee ballots were requested for its primary than the total number of votes cast in the 2019 primary by nearly 250,000. ["As we look all the way back to 2016, if all the absentee ballots are returned, we will have the largest number of people voting in one of our primaries in at least the last decade."](#) [Governor Andy Beshear said](#). After seeing the positive impact, Governor Beshear is now hopeful that mail-in voting and no-excuse early voting will continue to be options come November.

The results of Georgia's primary strongly indicate that encouraging as many voters as possible to vote by mail can aid significantly in providing access to voting. We can similarly impact increased turnout in Mississippi in November if we continue to advocate together for expanded voting access come November. Recent events in Mississippi have shown that if we work together towards the same goal, we can get a lot done. If we start now, just like we did with the flag, we can come together and ensure a free, safe, and secure election come November. Join in the fight with us for a free, fair and secure election in Mississippi on November 3, 2020.

[Get involved!](#)

Volunteer Highlights

Our volunteers are a crucial part of our operation. We have accomplished a lot so far this year, and we have our volunteers to thank for our progress. We want to take some time to highlight some of our star volunteers who help make our efforts possible.

Jacqueline Marsaw, Adams County Liaison

Previous Civic Engagement:

- Field operator for Aisha Sanders for House and Tammy Witherspoon for Senate
- 2020 Census Worker
- Advisor for Phillip West's mayoral campaign
- Been involved in the ground game for every Democratic race for as long as she can remember.

"I know for a fact we need Voter Protection because a lot of mistakes and shady things are going on that enable voter suppression, and as a result, people are often denied their right to vote or their absentee ballots are thrown out because of improper training, 2020 is very important for the Democrats, and it is much needed to claim victory."

Walter Young Jr., Madison County Liaison

Previous Civic Engagement:

- Volunteer with Pathways to Possibilities (P2P) Career Exploration Fair – Financial Section
- Volunteer with Mississippi Food Network.
- Helped My Fraternity (Omega Psi Phi) pass out PPEs and Voter Registration form.

"Voter Protection is important to me because it is a privilege given to American citizens. A privilege that some people believe others should not have, so they find ways to take this Freedom. I want to be on the offense to protect this benefit. I got involved in MSDP because I was asked and I saw an opportunity to help ensure that the voting process is carried out fair for all people.

I think this year is better than years past, because the younger generation are more engaged in social events that affect their lives. With the vehicle of social media, more people are aware of the current situation of worldly affairs. I honestly believe people are starting to see the result of systemic racism and are just tired of it. Having a MSDP Voter Protection Team will impact my community by giving them a voice, a face, and a point of contact if there is an issue with their right to vote.”

Written By:

LaToya Thompson, Esq, Voter Protection Director

Merritt Baria, Voter Protection Organizer

Jarrius Adams, Voter Protection Organizer

State News Desk

1. [“Coronavirus in Mississippi: Virus now responsible for over 1,000 deaths in state”](#)

A day after Mississippi reported its highest single-day coronavirus cases to date, the state set its second-highest case record Wednesday at 526 and surpassed 1,000 deaths, according to the Mississippi State Department of Health.

2. [“Mississippi election: See results from GOP primary runoff, House special election”](#)

The spread of COVID-19 in Mississippi called for Gov. Tate Reeves to delay the Republican primary runoff election and the special election. Mississippi is one of six states that haven't moved toward mail-in ballots because of the coronavirus pandemic. Voters in Mississippi can finally cast their ballot in person on Tuesday in both elections.

3. [“OPINION: Watson’s Voting Views: Dressing Jim Crow Up in New Clothes”](#)

On May 18, Mississippi Secretary of State Michael Watson issued a statement on voting in the November election. He begins sensibly saying, “we do not believe voters should have to choose between casting a ballot and risking their own health.”

National News Desk

4. [“Connections: Discussing voting rights and voter suppression in America, past and present”](#)

Long lines and malfunctioning voting machines in Georgia's primary election renewed conversations about voting rights, especially those for disenfranchised voters. The New York Times called the issues a "full-scale meltdown of new voting systems." Those systems were put in place after claims of voter suppression in 2018.

5. [“LETTER: Voter suppression a bigger threat than voting by mail”](#)

President Donald Trump and Attorney General William Barr are worried about the integrity of the November election. They claim votes cast by mail will open the floodgates to fraud, although they fail to provide any data or examples to back that up.

6. [“Chiefs QB Patrick Mahomes teams with LeBron James to stop voter suppression”](#)

Kansas City Chiefs quarterback Patrick Mahomes has joined forces with basketball star LeBron James and a number of other Black athletes and entertainers in the “More Than A Vote” campaign. The initiative, launched on Monday evening in the wake of nationwide protests and demands for social justice, is aimed at creating change through voting and protecting voting rights in the Black community.