

4/28/20

Corinne Duncan, Director
Jake Quinn, Board Chair
Elizabeth Newman, Board Secretary
John D. Watson III, Board Member
Stephen G. Duncan, Board Member
Linda Block, Board Member
Buncombe County Election Services
77 McDowell St.
Asheville NC, 28801

Re: Recommendations to ensure access for all voters in our community during the 2020 General Election.

The undersigned organizations know that you will be making important decisions on how to administer the upcoming election in light of the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. In order to secure safe voting options for all, including access for historically-marginalized Buncombe County voters, we put forth the following recommendations to defend and broaden voting options to:

- 1. Ensure that Black voters have access to the ballot by including the Dr. Wesley Grant Southside Center in the one-stop Early Voting plan for the 2020 General Election.**

In the 2020 Primary Election, Buncombe County had over 70 polling places on Election Day. The Grant Center was one of only three polling places used by more than 200 Black voters and one of only eight polling places used by more than 100 Black voters.

The Grant Center serves the greatest share (7%) of Black registered voters in Buncombe County where only 5% of all registered voters in Buncombe are Black.

In the 2016 General Election during Early Voting, the Grant Center was used by 2,696 voters. Notably, 45% of Grant Center voters were Black in a county where over 64% registered voters are white.

- 2. Ensure that Buncombe County's youngest voters have access to the ballot by including UNC Asheville, Warren Wilson College, and AB-Tech in the one-stop Early Voting plan for the 2020 General Election.**

Across the county the youth vote average is only 9% but both UNC Asheville and AB-Tech have much higher voter participation by youth voters.

In the 2016 General Election during Early Voting, 959 voters cast their ballots at AB-Tech and 33% of those voters were 18- to 25-years-old.

In the 2016 General Election during Early Voting, 3593 voters voted at UNC Asheville. 42% of voters were 18- to 25-years-old. Additionally, UNC Asheville is one of only five sites (out of 20) to serve more than 100 Hispanic/Latino voters.

UNC Asheville and Warren Wilson are both divided into two precincts. This division makes it even harder for students to vote on election day.

In addition to serving voters in the Swannanoa Valley, a site at Warren Wilson will also serve hundreds of students. 90% of WWC students live on campus along with many faculty and staff members. Students and faculty also do not have access to ART bus service from campus, which makes reaching other sites more difficult.

3. Keep sites open every weekend with robust hours during Early Voting, including Sundays, so that more working voters can access the ballot.

In the 2020 Primary Election, the two days of Saturday Early Voting saw more than double the number of votes per hour (46/hr) than the three weeks of weekday voting (22/hr). Despite there only being one Sunday, voters cast 13 votes per hour.

4. Ensure adequate staffing and sustaining realistic funding for this high turnout presidential election amid a global pandemic.

We acknowledge that many counties, including Buncombe County, may be facing budget cuts prompted by the current public health crisis. We also acknowledge that the public health crisis presents new expenses for administering an election. Including implementing new social distancing and sanitation procedures, and processing a potentially historic amount of absentee ballots.

In addition to defending Early Voting options and considering innovative ways to recruit poll workers, we would also encourage the county to consider advocating to state leaders for policies and practices that could alleviate financial burdens on local elections, including: swift dispensation of federal and state funds to supplement election shortfalls and contingencies; suspending the uniform Early Voting hours requirement for 2020; and assistance with poll worker recruitment and incentives.

5. Ensure that there are paper ballots available in Spanish and English.

There were 3,902 Hispanic/Latinx registered voters for the March 3rd Primary. Only 2% of all registered voters in Buncombe County are Hispanic/Latinx. During the 2020 primary election (Early Voting period and Election Day), 42% of all Hispanic/Latinx

registered voters successfully cast a ballot. While the population is small, Hispanic/Latinx voters are voting and should have fair plans that serve them.

We would like to applaud the Board for including weekend hours with sites at UNC Asheville, AB-Tech, and the Grant Center in previous Early Voting plans. We know that without UNCA and AB Tech, youth voters go unserved. Without the Grant Center, Black voters will go unserved. Without full weekend hours, we will deprive voters of the most popular times to exercise their right. Without accessible ballots and safe voting options, folks in our county may have to decide between exercising their right to vote and their health.

Signed,

Sam Katz
President
American Civil Liberties Union of NC, WNC Chapter

Grace Long
President
American Civil Liberties Union of NC, UNC Asheville Chapter

Elina Morrison
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Amnesty International, UNC Asheville Chapter

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The Literacy Council of Buncombe County

Stephanie Jones-Byrne
Malaprop's Bookstore/Cafe
Director of Marketing and Author Events

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Model United Nations at UNC Asheville

Caitlin Tricomi
Co-President
PERIOD. At UNC Asheville

Kathia Fuentes Beyhaut
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Southerners On New Ground

Rev. Mark Ward
Lead Minister
Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Asheville

London Newton
Student Body President
UNC Asheville

Allison Gurliacci
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Co-President

Libby Kyles
Chief Executive Officer
YWCA of Asheville

Shuli Arieh Archer
Associate Dean of Community Engagement
Warren Wilson College

[Here](#) are some takeaways from this past primary and the 2016 general