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Voting Rights Advocates Seek to Protect Minority Voting Rights Following Relocation of Polling Site to Sheriff's Office

Groups Note Likely Chilling Effect on Minority Voter Turnout That Will Result from Macon-Bibb Board of Election's Decision to Move Polling Site to Law Enforcement Agency

WASHINGTON, D.C., April 14, 2016 – This week, the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law (Lawyers' Committee), Georgia State Conference of the NAACP and Georgia Coalition for the Peoples' Agenda called upon the Macon-Bibb Board of Elections to reverse its decision to relocate the Godfrey 2 polling place, which serves a predominantly African-American community, to the Bibb County Sheriff's District 2 office for the May 24 and November 8 elections and run-offs.

“The vivid images of peaceful African-American demonstrators seeking access to the franchise being beaten and assaulted by the police are seared in the hearts and minds of many in the African-American community,” said Kristen Clarke, president and executive director of the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law. “The failure of the Board of Elections to consider this history and the chilling effect that its actions would have on black voters is astonishing. To protect the right to vote for all voters, including African-American voters, the Macon-Bibb Board of Elections must immediately reverse its decision to use the sheriff's office as a polling site.”

Moving this polling location to a sheriff's office is not only insensitive to the African-American voters in the Godfrey 2 precinct given this history, but may give rise to a claim under Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 because it will likely deter African-Americans from casting a ballot in the upcoming elections and result in the suppression of the African-American vote.

“Imagine if you are a voter who has been personally impacted by racial profiling or other discriminatory treatment by law enforcement or has experienced the death of a friend or family member as a result of a police shooting,” said Helen Butler, executive director of the Georgia Coalition for the Peoples’ Agenda. “Do you think that voter would not think twice, or even choose not to vote at all, if they had to vote at a police station or sheriff’s office where they would risk encountering these same law enforcement officers?”

“Whether the board’s decision was the product of ignorance, racial insensitivity or a deliberate effort to suppress the African-American vote in advance of the state primary and general elections is not yet clear,” said Francys Johnson, president of the Georgia State Conference of the NAACP. “Nevertheless, the board now has an opportunity to reconsider its decision and to relocate the polling location to a facility operated by the Macedonia Church, which has graciously offered to provide space for the polling place during the 2016 elections.”

For the letter to the Macon-Bibb Board of Elections, click [here](#).

For the letter from the Macedonia Church, click [here](#).

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