



SPLC ANNOUNCES GEORGIA-BASED ACTIONS TO FUND BALLOT DROP BOXES IN FULTON CO. AND MAIL 1 MILLION ABSENTEE BALLOT REQUESTS TO MEET VOTER NEEDS IN HISTORIC ELECTION

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Additional secure drop boxes in Fulton, absentee ballot request forms will allow voters opting to mail in ballots to avoid exposure to COVID-19

ATLANTA – Today, in response to the anticipated overwhelming number of absentee ballots that will be cast during the 2020 General Election in November and service cuts to the United States Postal Service (USPS), the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) announced it provided funding to Fulton County, Georgia, for the purchase of up to 25 absentee drop boxes* to be distributed throughout the county. The SPLC also announced that it will mail over one million voters of color across all 159 Georgia counties 3 separate times – first with information on the online portal to facilitate absentee voting, then with a blank copy of the official Secretary of State application to request an absentee ballot along with instructions for completion and submission by mail, and finally a last reminder on absentee voting. The deadline for requesting an absentee ballot in Georgia is October 30.

The organization's efforts are part of a multi-pronged strategy along with its Vote Your Voice campaign to eliminate as many barriers to the ballot box as possible in Georgia and across the Deep South.

“The Southern Poverty Law Center has long worked with its community partners and organizers to engage and mobilize voters across the country with particular focus on communities of color throughout the South,” said Seth Levi, Chief Strategy Officer for the SPLC. “Today’s announcement demonstrates our commitment to aiding individual voters as well as local governments secure necessary voting infrastructure so that no one has to choose between participating in the democratic process and protecting their health.”

The extraordinary number of voters who will apply for and cast absentee (vote by mail) ballots in this election may burden the United States Postal Service, and the USPS already notified forty-six states, including the State of Georgia, that it expects the delivery of ballots to be delayed due to the anticipated surge in mail-in voting.

In light of an expected increase in mail-in absentee ballots, the State Election Board (SEB) in Georgia has adopted emergency rules that allow counties to establish drop boxes for the receipt of absentee ballots. The drop boxes provide a free and convenient option for voting, allowing voters to deposit their absentee ballots without the need for postage, and without risking exposure to COVID-19 or the long lines that often plague in-person voting.

Meanwhile, across the entire state of Georgia, the SPLC estimates that 73 percent of voters who have requested an absentee ballot so far in the state are high propensity voters, meaning they vote in nearly every election. Because lower propensity voters of color are less likely to be aware that they do not need an excuse, such as being out of town, to vote absentee, the SPLC is targeting many of them with official absentee ballot applications and instructions.

Included in the over one million eligible voters to be sent mailings are also new registrants of color since 2016, as well as more high propensity older voters of color who, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, may feel safer voting from home but are not tech-savvy enough to effectively use the state’s online absentee ballot request system.

For the voters that do request ballots in this group, the SPLC plans to follow up by mail and in digital ads to ensure voters mail or drop off their ballot as soon as possible to be processed and counted. Digital ads to this

group will also highlight the locations of official ballot drop boxes where they exist across Metro Atlanta.

Levi concluded, “The SPLC is proud to assist in providing the necessary grant funding to counties like Fulton facing budgetary constraints and support efforts to increase the safe exercise of absentee voting. However, the ultimate solution is increased support and funding guarantees from the Governor and Secretary of State to ensure all people have equal access to voting regardless of their county of residence or zip code.”

*To comply with current State regulations, the drop boxes in Fulton are placed on county or municipal property; they have video surveillance; and they are made of durable material able to withstand inclement weather and vandalism. The cost of a single drop box can be as high as \$6,000. The SPLC anticipates providing funding totaling \$85,000 to pay for approximately 25 new boxes and accompanying video security equipment in the county.

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