



August 20, 2020

*By Email & Certified Mail*

Dorchester County Board of Elections  
Queen E. Bowman, Chair  
201 Johnston Street  
St. George, SC 29477

**Re: Supporting the Restoration of the Polling Site at Sand Hill United Methodist Church**

Dear Chair Bowman and Members of the Board of Elections:

The NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (“LDF”) writes to urge the Dorchester County Board of Elections (“Board”) to (1) meaningfully engage and respond to the Clubhouse community’s concerns about the Delemars polling relocation and (2) restore the Sand Hill United Methodist Church (“Sand Hill UMC”) as the Delemars polling location for the November 2020 general election.

For more than seven months, Clubhouse community members have attempted to bring to the Board’s attention their concerns regarding Executive Director Billman’s decision to move the Delemars polling location from Sand Hill UMC to Sand Hill Elementary School. Clubhouse community members, for example, attended the Board meeting on January 16, 2020 and have submitted petitions and requests for the Board’s consideration to restore Sand Hill UMC as the Delemars polling location, including a letter submitted on March 10, 2020 by certified mail. Although the Board initially responded to concerns about the polling place relocation through a letter dated February 21, 2020, it has since then neither meaningfully engaged nor responded to the request submitted on March 10, 2020. Accordingly, we urge the Board to respond to the Clubhouse community’s request to restore Sand Hill UMC as the Delemars polling location during its August 20, 2020 meeting.

The Board has offered a variety of reasons for relocating the Delemars polling location, without documentation to support those claims. We understand the Board claimed that four reasons justified the polling place relocation: (1) security concerns about the Sand Hill UMC polling location; (2) problems with timely delivery of the voting machines at the Sand Hill UMC polling location; (3) that the Sand Hill UMC polling location is not accessible by van; and (4) that the polling place closed two minutes early during the November 2019 election.<sup>1</sup> It is our understanding that, prior to this election, voters have not raised any of these concerns during the 50 years that the

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<sup>1</sup> Letter of the Clubhouse Community, March 10, 2020.

Delemars polling location has been at or adjacent to the Sand Hill UMC. Nor had the Board ever raised these concerns either at its meetings or with the Clubhouse community before issuing a notice that it was moving the Delemars polling site. Indeed, the Board has given the Clubhouse accolades in the past for its precinct administration.<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, it is our understanding that Clubhouse community members disputed these purported concerns during the January 16 meeting. In a letter from the Board to Clubhouse community dated February 21, 2020, the Board raised a new reason to justify the Delemars polling place relocation: that it was making “concerted efforts to move all polling locations to government buildings.”<sup>3</sup> The letter did not provide any evidence to support the stated justifications for the polling place relocation that the Board offered on January 16.

We are also concerned that the polling place relocation may have a disproportionate impact on Black and low-income voters in the Delemars precinct. The new location, at Sand Hill Elementary School, is approximately 6.5 miles from the old location, far from the community that the polling place has served for decades, and near Summers Corner, a newer development with fewer Black residents. The zip code containing Sand Hill UMC has a roughly equal number of white and Black residents, while the zip code containing Sand Hill Elementary School has nearly four times as many white residents as Black residents.<sup>4</sup>

Across South Carolina, Black residents are more likely to live in poverty and less likely to have access to cars than white residents.<sup>5</sup> In the Delemars precinct, many Black residents are economically disadvantaged and do not own vehicles or have access to other convenient transportation options (public or otherwise). Longer distance to the polls may discourage or completely prevent low-income and Black voters from participation on election days. Members of the Clubhouse community are deeply concerned that many members of their community will neither be able to go to Sand Hill Elementary School to vote, nor will they feel comfortable doing so.

We hope that this information will encourage you to move the Delemars polling place back to Sand Hill UMC at your August 20 meeting, and to ensure that any future polling place changes are made only after greater investigation and consultation with affected communities. We would

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<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

<sup>3</sup> See Dorchester County Polling Locations, <https://www.dorchestercountysc.gov/government/administrative-services/election-commission/polling-locations>.

<sup>4</sup> United States Census Bureau, data.census.gov. Sand Hill UMC is in zip code 29472, which has 4,336 white residents and 3,957 Black residents. Sand Hill Elementary School is in zip code 29485, which has 41,165 white residents and 11,091 Black residents.

<sup>5</sup> *Poverty Status in the Past 12 Months of Families*, U.S. Census Bureau (2018); National Equity Atlas, [https://nationalequityatlas.org/indicators/Car\\_access#/?geo=02000000000045000](https://nationalequityatlas.org/indicators/Car_access#/?geo=02000000000045000).

welcome the opportunity to discuss these matters further. If you have any questions, please contact me at by email at [pmartin@naacpldf.org](mailto:pmartin@naacpldf.org) or phone at 646-831-7135.

Sincerely,

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