

Caddo Parish Commission
Government Plaza
505 Travis Street, Suite 800
Shreveport, LA 71101

September 10, 2021

VIA EMAIL

Dear Members of the Caddo Parish Commission:

On behalf of the Campaign Legal Center, NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Power Coalition for Equity and Justice, as well as Black Voters Matter Fund, Loving Little Ones Incorporated, South Shreveport Voters League, Noire-Louisiana Black Artists and Creatives Voices for Change, Shreveport Chapter of the NAACP, Shreveport-Bossier African American Chamber of Commerce, NWLA Makerspace, and The Ollie Initiative, we urge you to support the adoption of an additional early voting site in Caddo Parish.

As you know, there will be a statewide election on November 13, 2021 to vote on important amendments to the Louisiana Constitution and a local election regarding bond proposals on December 11, 2021 and the 2022 midterm elections are just around the corner. The recent decision by the Louisiana Governor and Secretary of State to move the date of the election to November 13, 2021 affords this Commission the opportunity to establish an additional early voting location in time for the early voting period.

As you are also aware, despite its large geographic area of 852 square miles,¹ Caddo Parish currently plans to only have one early voting location for these elections. With only one early voting location, Caddo Parish voters must wait longer and travel farther to vote than many other voters in the state. During early voting in 2020, for example, Caddo voters had to wait

¹ Caddo Parish, Parish History, <http://www.caddo.org/98/Parish-History> (last visited Aug. 16, 2021).

several hours to vote.² Of course, many voters simply cannot wait in long lines because of work, family, health, or other obligations. The opportunity for all Caddo voters to cast their ballots is unnecessarily suppressed by limiting early voting to one location and this especially disadvantages voters of color and rural voters.

This Commission has the power to improve the voting experience for the citizens of Caddo Parish. While early voting locations are chosen by the Secretary of State, the Commission plays a significant role in deciding where early voting locations are placed in the parish.³ The Secretary of State will approve an additional site if this Commission requests one.⁴ Expanded early voting in Caddo Parish is long overdue. We urge you to act now.

I. The Problem for Voters of Color and Rural Voters

Caddo Parish is the fourth-largest parish in the Louisiana. Our research shows that compared to voters in the three largest parishes in the state—East Baton Rouge, Jefferson, and Orleans Parishes, Caddo Parish residents experience greater difficulties in exercising their right to vote.⁵ As described below, Caddo also has fewer early voting sites than many smaller parishes. Specifically, Caddo’s single early voting site serves almost as many Black voters as the average number of Black voters per site in the three larger parishes *combined*:

<i>Parish</i>	<i>Number of Early Voting Locations in 2020</i>	<i>Total Population</i>	<i>Total Registered Black Voters in November 2020</i>	<i>Total Citizen Black Voting Age Population</i>	<i>Number of Registered Black Voters Per Early Voting Location</i>
<i>Jefferson</i>	4	434,850	75,492	83,130	18,873
<i>Orleans</i>	4	390,845	150,327	175,965	37,581
<i>East Baton Rouge</i>	5	443,763	132,638	147,400	29,480
<i>Caddo</i>	1	245,831	76,826	86,700	76,826

² See Deborah Bayliss, *Long lines as early voting gets underway in Shreveport*, SHREVEPORT TIMES (Oct. 16, 2020), <https://www.shreveporttimes.com/story/news/2020/10/16/election-2020-early-voting-shreveport-la-begins-turnout-high-caddo-parish/3668905001/>.

³ La. Stat. Ann. § 18:1309 (A)(2), (B)(1).

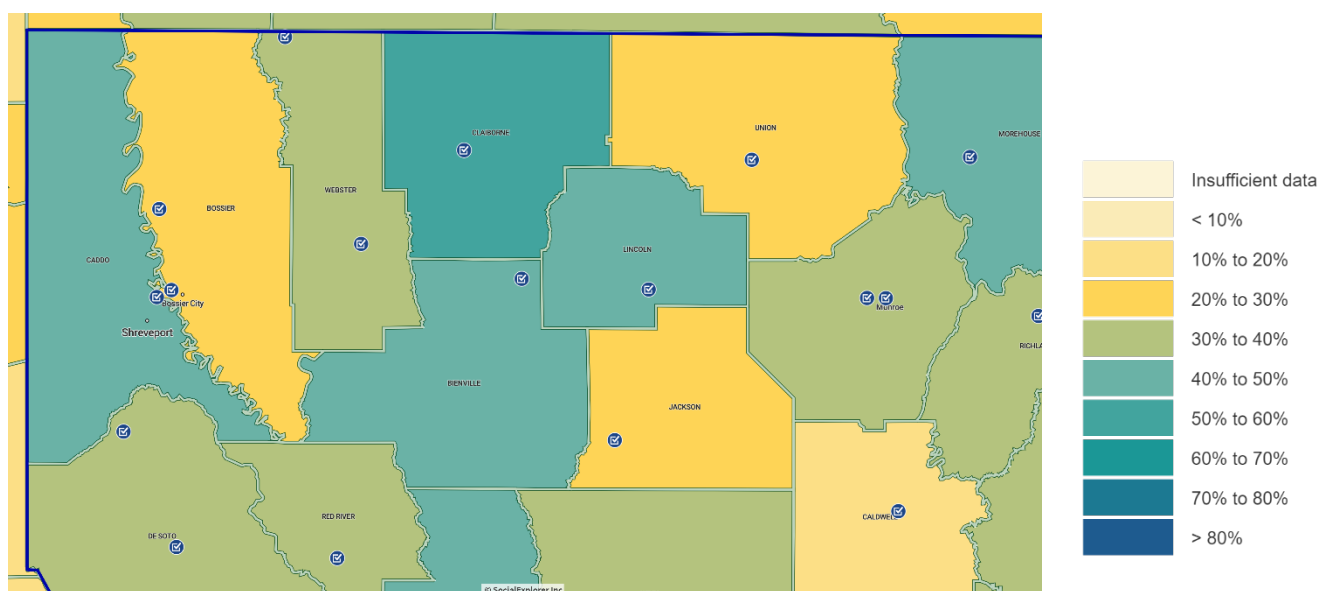
⁴ Sec’y of State Kyle Ardoin comments before the House and Governmental Affairs Comm. (Jan. 5, 2021), https://house.louisiana.gov/H_Video/VideoArchivePlayer?v=house/2021/jan/0105_21_HGa (at 16:25).

⁵ *Increasing In-Person Voting Access: An Advocacy Toolkit for Louisiana Organizers*, CAMPAIGN LEGAL CTR. AND NAACP LEGAL DEFENSE FUND (July 2021), <https://campaignlegal.org/sites/default/files/2021-07/Louisiana%20Poll%20Site%20Advocacy%20Toolkit%20%281%29.pdf>.

Additionally, estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau indicate that 10.5% of homes in Caddo Parish have no access to a vehicle; only Orleans Parish has a lower rate of vehicle access.⁶ It is especially problematic that a parish that covers a large area geographically but has a low rate of vehicle access employs only a single early voting location. Voters without cars are severely restricted in accessing the only early voting location available to them because some live up to roughly 50 miles from the location.

Not only does Caddo Parish provide less access to early voting for its citizens than other large parishes, it also provides less access to early voting than many smaller and less diverse parishes surrounding parishes. For example, De Soto Parish, which is 61.5% white, 35.4% Black, and 2.9% Hispanic or Latino—and has a population of 27,289—has two early voting locations.⁷ Next door, Bossier Parish, which is 71.9% white, 22.8% Black, and 6.8% Hispanic or Latino—and has a population of 126,499—also has two early voting locations.

More examples in the region show that Caddo Parish is an outlier as the largest parish in North Louisiana:



This map demonstrates the number of early voting locations relative to the percent Black population in North Louisiana. Caddo Parish, which has highest population of Black voters in the region, has one early voting location. Nearby parishes, including Bossier and Webster, both of which have a lower population overall and lower Black population, both enjoy two early voting polling places each. Source: Data obtained from the Louisiana Secretary of State’s public database. Maps by Social Explorer.

⁶ The percentage of homes that have no vehicle available in the four largest parishes are 10.5 percent in Caddo, 7.5 percent in East Baton Rouge, 7.2 percent in Jefferson, and 18.6 percent in Orleans. U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, American Community Survey, 2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, accessed at <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=car%20ownership&g=0500000US22017,22033,22051,22071&tid=ACSDP5Y2019.DP04&hidePreview=true>.

⁷ U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, American Community Survey, 2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, accessed at data.census.gov.

As this data shows, *all* Caddo voters are disserved by the Commission’s ongoing failure to unite in seeking an additional early voting location.

II. Calls for a Solution

Caddo voters have consistently expressed a desire for an additional early voting location. As recently as August 2020, voters spoke at a Commission hearing to express support for an additional early voting location, which the Commission ultimately voted against.⁸ This is not the first time that voters have reached out to the Commission to request an early voting site; advocates have been making this request since at least 2016.⁹ In sum, the data shows evidence of the need, and the voters have confirmed that need.

We ask that you please respond to this request no later than Monday, September 27, 2021. We urge you to seek an additional early voting location, beginning with the November 13, 2021 election and effective for all future elections.

If you have any questions, please contact Candice Battiste, at 318.615.9203 or cbattiste@powercoalition.org.

Best,

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⁸ Parish of Caddo, Caddo Parish Commission, FACEBOOK (Aug. 25, 2020), https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?extid=5vqXaUK9GHVWL0id&v=318295356278061&ref=watch_permalink.

⁹ See Deborah Bayliss, *Caddo Commission discusses early voting sites; approves community policing initiative*, SHREVEPORT TIMES (Oct. 23, 2020), <https://www.shreveporttimes.com/story/news/2020/10/23/caddo-commission-talks-early-voting-sites-ok-policing-initiative/3726718001/> (statement from Commissioner Stormy Gage Watts that “We started this conversation in 2016 so, I want citizens to know that Caddo Parish Commissioners did not think of this as an afterthought because of the pandemic. This was something that we have been lobbying for and advocating for quite some time.”).

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