



NAACP  
FLORIDA STATE CONFERENCE



*Sent Via Email*

October 31, 2022

Tommy Doyle  
Lee County Supervisor of Elections  
P.O. Box 2545  
Fort Myers, FL 33902  
Email: [elections@lee.vote](mailto:elections@lee.vote)

Re: Voting Access in Fort Myers

Dear Supervisor Doyle:

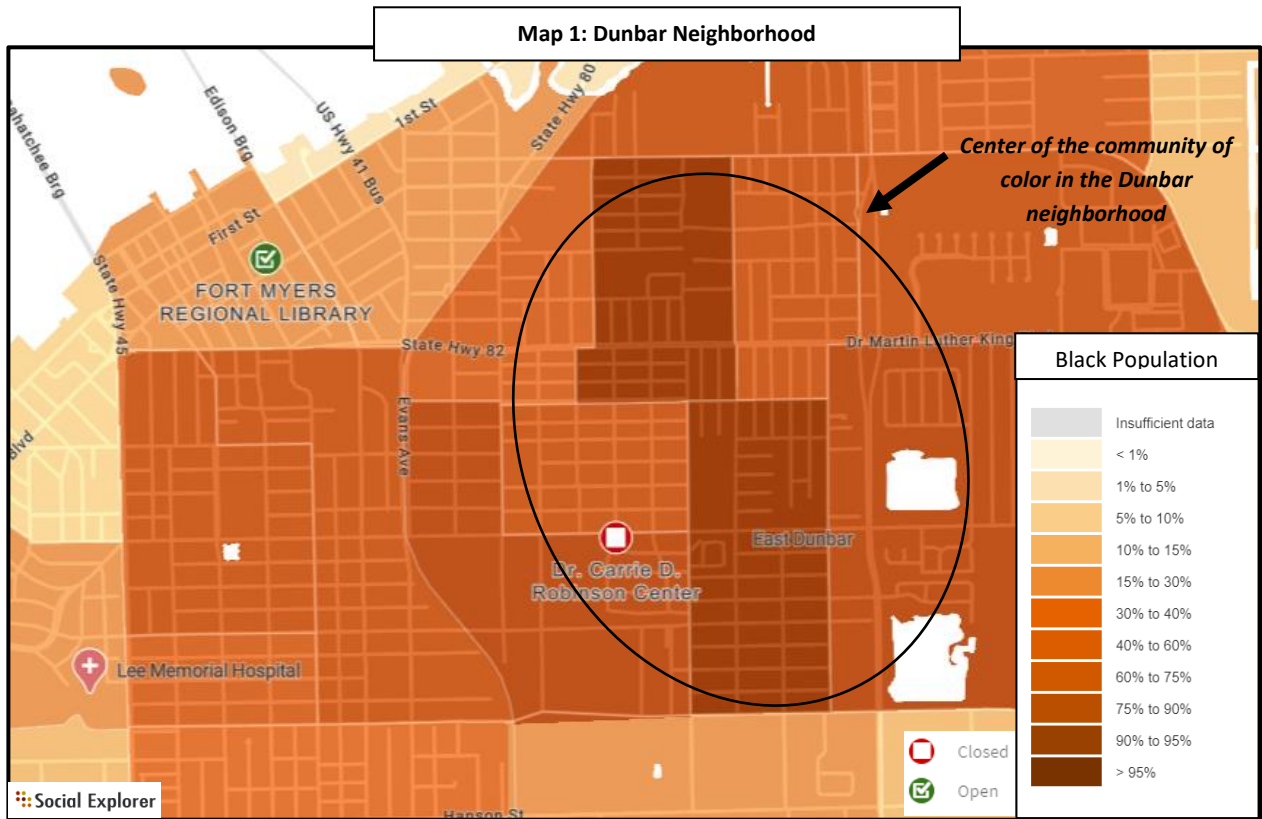
On behalf of the Lee County NAACP, the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc., the NAACP Florida State Conference, Common Cause Florida, All Voting is Local Florida, the League of Women Voters of Florida, and the League of Women Voters of Lee County, we write to express our concern over the lack of voting access in certain communities of color in Fort Myers as a result of your decision to close Lee County's 99 traditional polling places and instead use Lee County's 12 early voting sites as election day polling places.

We acknowledge the difficulty of preparing for a major election following the destruction of Hurricane Ian. We recognize that your office has been forced to navigate grave challenges and make difficult decisions over the last several weeks. We understand the reasoning behind your decision to close Lee County's 99 traditional election day polling places and instead offer just 12 sites for election day voting and early voting. However, we urge you to add just two additional locations that can operate as early voting sites, election day polling places, and drop box locations to ensure that communities of color, which have been especially hard-hit by Hurricane Ian, have equitable access to vote.

**1. Voters in the Dunbar Neighborhood Lack Access.**

As shown in Map 1 below, the only polling place in the Dunbar neighborhood, which is a community comprised predominantly of people of color, has been closed. In prior elections, voters in this area were able to vote at the Dr. Carrie D. Robinson Center, located at 2990 Edison Ave, Fort Myers, FL 33916. Now, the closest location is the Fort Myers Regional Library, located at 1651 Lee St., Fort Myers, FL 33901, which is in a predominantly white

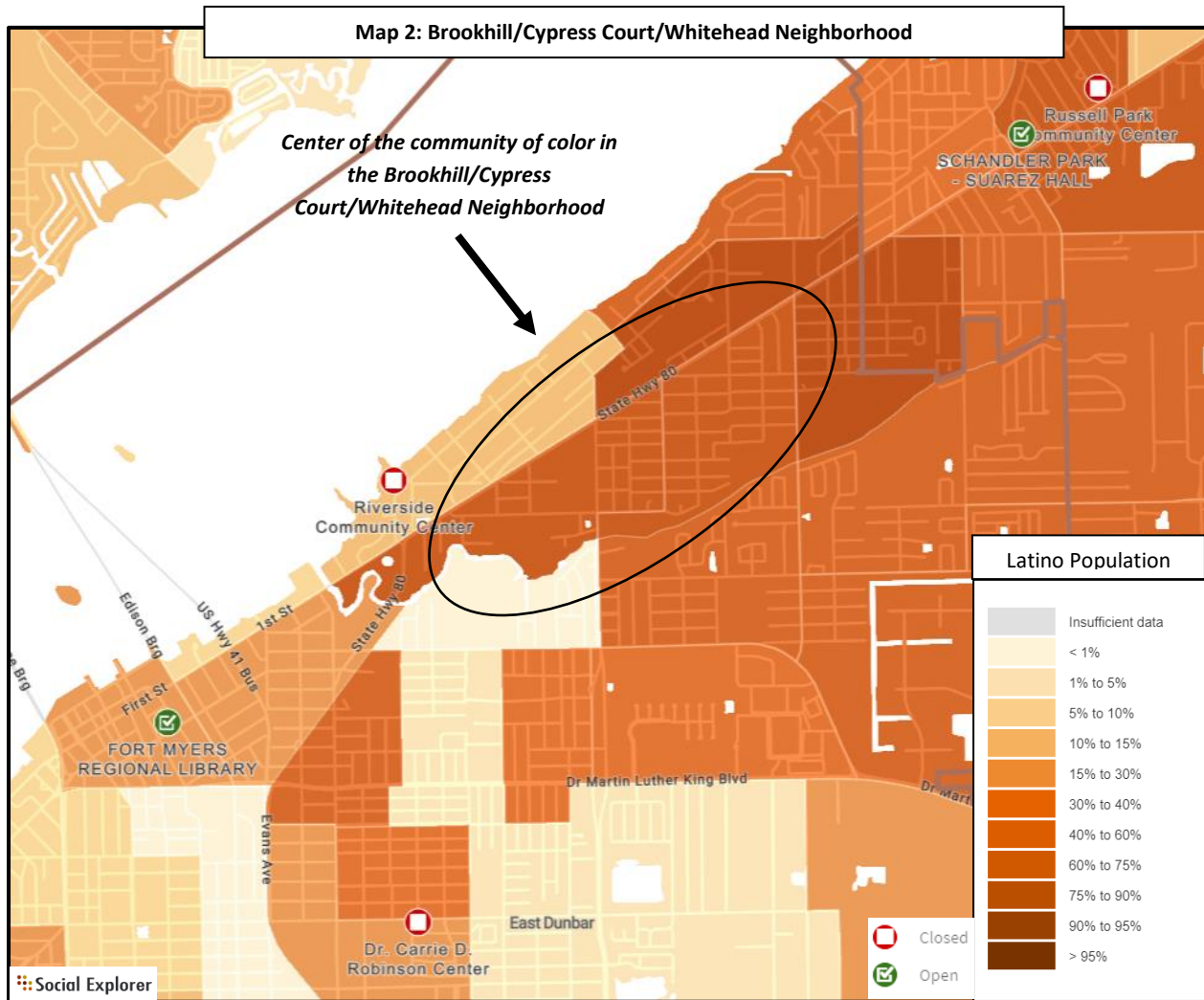
neighborhood. The center of the community of color in Dunbar is approximately 3 miles from the Fort Myers Regional Library (walking time of approximately 55 minutes each way).



The Dunbar community was especially hard-hit by Hurricane Ian. As a result of severe damage to local infrastructure, there is limited public transportation, and many roads have been damaged to the point that they are not usable. Some Dunbar residents have been temporarily displaced, but many who remain will be forced to walk to their polling place.

## **2. Voters in the Brookhill/Cypress Court/Whitehead Creek Neighborhood Lack Access.**

As shown in Map 2 below, the only polling place in the Brookhill/Cypress Court/Whitehead Creek neighborhood, which is also predominantly a community of color, has been closed. In prior elections, voters in this area were able to vote at the Riverside Community Center, located at 3061 E Riverside Dr, Fort Myers, FL 33916. Now, the closest locations are either the Fort Myers Regional Library, or the Schandler Park Suarez Hall, located at 419 Royal Palm Park Rd, Fort Myers, FL 33905. Neither of these locations are sufficient: the center of the community of color in the Brookhill/Cypress Court/Whitehead Creek area is approximately 2.5 miles from the Fort Myers Regional Library (walking time of approximately 50 minutes each way) and 2 miles from the Schandler Park Suarez Hall (walking time of approximately 40 minutes each way).



Like the Dunbar community, the Brookhill/Cypress Court/Whitehead Creek area was especially hard-hit by Hurricane Ian, and there is limited public transportation and severe damage to roads. Many residents in these communities will have no choice but to walk to their polling place.

**3. Your Office Should Immediately Take Steps to Improve Access to Polling Locations for These Communities.**

For the reasons explained above, we are concerned that communities of color in Fort Myers, which have been especially hard-hit by Hurricane Ian, lack equitable access to polling places. This is especially concerning because *all twelve* locations that will be open for early

voting and election day in Lee County are located in predominantly white communities.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, we urge you to immediately take several steps to improve voting access for residents of communities of color:

1. Identify a suitable location in the Dunbar community that can serve as (i) an early voting site; (ii) a drop box location; and (iii) an election day polling place, and endeavor to open that site as early as possible during the early voting period. We believe that the Dunbar-Jupiter Library, located at 3095 Blount St., Fort Myers, FL 33916, is an acceptable option for an early voting site, drop box location, and election day polling place. Although the Dr. Carrie Robinson D. Center has suffered significant damage and is unlikely to be a suitable location for voting this year, it could be a suitable location for a drop box.
  
2. Identify a suitable location in the Brookhill/Cypress Court/Whitehead Creek Area that can serve as (i) an early voting site; (ii) a drop box location; and (iii) an election day precinct, and endeavor to open that site as early as possible during the early voting period. We believe that the James Stevens Elementary School, located at 1333 Marsh Ave., Fort Myers, FL 33905, would be a suitable location.

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<sup>1</sup> Lee County early voting and election day polling places and white population (according to the 2020 Census):

<b>Location</b>	<b>Census Tract</b>	<b>White Population</b>
North Fort Myers Recreation Center	Tract 208.02, Lee County, Florida	80.75%
Northwest Regional Library	Tract 101.08, Lee County, Florida	85.89%
Lee County Elections – Cape Coral Branch Office	Tract 103.07, Lee County, Florida	88.83%
Cape Coral – Lee County Library	Tract 104.21, Lee County, Florida	77.93%
Schandler Park – Suarez Hall	Tract 4.01, Lee County, Florida	87.90%
Fort Myers Regional Library	Tract 803, Lee County, Florida	78.08%
Lee County Elections Center	Tract 17.08, Lee County, Florida	87.79%
Wa-ke Hatchee Park Recreation Center	Tract 19.21, Lee County, Florida	99.05%
East County Regional Library	Tract 401.24, Lee County, Florida	53.61%
Veterans Park Recreation Center	Tract 403.16, Lee County, Florida	64.06%
Estero Recreation Center	Tract 503.06, Lee County, Florida	96.75%
Lee County Elections – Bonita Springs Branch Office	Tract 503.17, Lee County, Florida	97.87%

3. Station a staff member outside of the Dr. Carrie D. Robinson Center and the Riverside Community Center from 7:00 A.M. to 7:00 P.M. on Election Day to provide assistance to voters who show up at these closed locations seeking to cast their ballot.

We ask that you respond by Wednesday, November 2 to inform us of the steps you will take to address the issues raised in this letter. In addition, if you need assistance identifying suitable locations for additional polling places, please let us know and we are happy to work with you to find locations that would be suitable for the affected community.

Sincerely,

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NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (“LDF”)

Since its founding in 1940, LDF has used litigation, policy advocacy, public education, and community organizing strategies to achieve racial justice and equity in the areas of education, economic justice, political participation, and criminal justice. Throughout its history, LDF has worked to enforce and promote laws and policies that prohibit voter discrimination, intimidation, and suppression and increase access to the electoral process.

NAACP Florida State Conference

Founded in 1909, the NAACP is the nation’s oldest and largest nonpartisan civil rights organization. Its members throughout the United States and the world are the premier advocates for civil rights in their communities. In 1941, the NAACP Florida State Conference was formed as the 1st State Conference in the nation.

Common Cause Education Fund, Inc.

Common Cause is a nonpartisan, grassroots organization dedicated to upholding the core values of American democracy. We work to create open, honest, and accountable government that serves the public interest; promote equal rights, opportunity, and representation for all; and empower all people to make their voices heard in the political process. We employ grassroots organizing, coalition building, research, policy development, public education, lobbying and litigation to win reform at all levels of government.

All Voting is Local (AVIL)

All Voting is Local, a nonpartisan organization, exists to expose and dismantle threats to voter freedom in order to make voting safe, fair, and accessible, to build a democracy for us all. For more information about All Voting is Local, visit <https://allvotingislocal.org>.

#### League of Women Voters of Florida

The League of Women Voters of Florida works to register voters, provide voters with nonpartisan election information through voter guides as well as candidate forums and debates. The League encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy.