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Contact: Natalia Garzon
212-965-2786 / ngarzon@naacpldf.org

Sumter County, SC's Proposed School Closures and Electoral Changes Are Potentially Harmful to Black Communities

Despite fierce and overwhelming public opposition, the Sumter County School District in South Carolina is finalizing plans to close rural schools, attended by predominately Black students, in an attempt to address the School District's unexplained \$6.2 million-dollar deficit.

In a [letter](#) to the Interim Superintendent of the Sumter School District and the members of the School Board, LDF, on its own behalf and on behalf of the Family Unit, a Sumter non-profit, charitable organization, have expressed concerns surrounding the rushed and non-transparent process that has surrounded the proposals to close schools attended by predominately Black students in rural Sumter by the end of the 2018. According to LDF and the Family Unit, the School District's proposal to close schools is not based on a meaningful analysis of the impacts on the students, their families, and the surrounding communities in which those students and families reside, and the schools are located. Indeed, officials did not even attempt to hear from community members or undertake any studies of the consequences of the closures, which still have not been made public, until many months after targeting predominately Black schools for closure.

The letter also raises concerns about the state government's decision to pass legislation in 2017 that added two at-large elected members to the then seven-member district-based elected School Board members. Under the legislation, these two at-large board seats were initially appointed in 2017 and will stand for election as incumbents this year. This legislation was enacted *after* South Carolina's Governor vetoed it because it "deprives the Sumter County electorate of its opportunity to duly elect representatives to fill these seats and gives undue influence on state representatives," and the district-based elected school board members rejected the proposals to close the rural schools in Sumter. LDF is reviewing whether this redistricting legislation denies or diminishes voters, particularly Black voters', equal opportunity to elect their preferred candidates to the School Board in violation of federal law.

Read the full letter [here](#).

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Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) since 1957—although LDF was originally founded by the NAACP and shares its commitment to equal rights. LDF's Thurgood Marshall Institute is a multi-disciplinary and collaborative hub within LDF that launches targeted campaigns and undertakes innovative research to shape the civil rights narrative. In media attributions, please refer to us as the NAACP Legal Defense Fund or LDF.