

Hello to the UUSJ board!

It has been an exciting time for UUSJ's collaboration with the Reeb Project in support of fairness, equity and justice in voting rights. The recent elections in Georgia and Wisconsin have made it starkly clear that the progress of American democracy can often hang on the tiniest of details: an absentee ballot lost in the mail, a voter avoiding the polls for fear of COVID-19, voter registration information printed only in English, a polling place unexpectedly closed in a BIPOC neighborhood, a broken voting machine, reduced hours at an understaffed early voting location, a line out the door. Now, more than ever, it is incumbent on us to help with the hard work of democracy in the face of both old obstacles and new. Our UU values call on us to help protect the use of the democratic process and right of conscience, and to strive for justice and equity in all things. Here's what the Reeb and UUSJ congregations have done this month to make positive change:

- *Targeting Areas of Greatest Need*

This year, we have committed to working in four states: VA, PA, NC and GA. We have identified a number of key areas within these states that have been hard-hit by voter suppression. This can take many forms, from suppressive legislation to onerous restrictions on mail/absentee/early voting to systematic polling place closures in POC neighborhoods. In some states, we have identified districts where boosted voter registration and GOTV efforts can make a concrete difference to overall state outcomes. In other states, we have identified the biggest needs around larger structural concerns: in Pennsylvania, for example, the law has recently changed to allow for no-excuses mail balloting, but due in part to COVID, public awareness of this new law is low. In Virginia, new voter registrations have dropped precipitously as organizers struggle to figure out how to reach new voters in a time of social distancing. We've focused our own work in the areas where we see the greatest vulnerability and thus, the greatest opportunities for real structural change.

- *Building Our Own Congregational Capacity*

We are working with individual UUSJ congregations to identify their current capacity (which range from congregations with long-organized groups already doing impressive electoral work to congregations with two or three interested potential volunteers looking for a place to begin.) Right now, Kelsey is reaching out to every congregation represented in the UUSJ board, gauging their areas of interest, working to support existing projects and introducing new projects that multiple congregations can work on at the same time. As these relationships develop, Kelsey will work with individual congregations on developing their own groups internally, including matters of outreach within the congregation and fundraising.

- *Making Connections With Partner Organizations*

Because we are primarily working outside of our geographic area, it is critical to be able to work with partner groups in the states that we're targeting. These partner groups bring local knowledge and expertise, and are better positioned to identify areas of greatest need. We also rely on our partner groups for data: call lists, addresses, cell numbers for text banks.

Because our focus is on underserved communities that have been historically targeted for voter suppression, we strive to work primarily with partner organizations that center the needs of BIPOC, immigrant and high poverty communities. We are currently working with a number of organizations, including Reclaim Our Vote/NAACP, POWER Interfaith in Pennsylvania, Democracy in Action NC, the Pennsylvania Immigration and Citizenship Coalition, VOICE in Virginia and the Georgia Latino Alliance for Human Rights. We hope to build and strengthen these partnerships over the next few months, and are also looking to develop new ones.

- *Developing Relationships With UUs in Other States*

We are working with the UUA State Action Networks to make connections with UU congregations in targeted states around our shared values and shared work. In the absence of a SAN, we are beginning to develop relationships in a congregation-to-congregation way, working with individual clergy and lay leaders to help build electoral organizations within their congregations. Our hope is to build relationships between individual congregations in our targeted states and individual congregations in the UUSJ network, an idea which will develop over the course of the next several months.

- *Projects!*

We've just begun an exciting postcarding project with Reclaim Our Vote, the electoral wing of the NAACP. We're coattailing on several congregations who have already been doing this important work, but these projects are reasonably easy to spin up (even with small groups) and thus, are a great way for congregations to begin to organize their own electoral efforts. Right now, we're writing bilingual postcards into Texas, encouraging older bilingual voters who live along the border to apply to vote by mail. Soon, we'll be switching our focus to North Carolina, encouraging voters who are at risk of being purged from the voter rolls to confirm their address with the Secretary of State. ROV relies on the expertise of local organizers and residents at every level, and that even extends to postcard design: the postcards we're sending have been proven effective in getting voters to take action (in comparison to postcards that, for example, contain the image of the American flag which can scare voters who might distrust the current government). Here's an example:



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During General Assembly, we'll be working with UU the Vote to make calls to voters in Texas, and as we move into July, we'll be pivoting into doing voter registration work in Virginia and Pennsylvania (both states where registration has lagged significantly). This will hopefully include some innovative partnerships: for example, we're setting up a project where we will work with the Pennsylvania Immigration and Citizenship Coalition (plus a group of volunteer translators) to help register newly naturalized citizens to vote. This will also give us momentum to kick off get out the vote work as we move into the fall and up to the November elections.