



# DEKALB CITYHOOD MOVEMENT

FORMING A CITY IN SOUTHERN DEKALB

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February 4, 2022

The President  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We're writing to advise you that we have a problem in which we seek your intercession. The loyal Democrats in southern DeKalb County Georgia that helped elect you and Senator Ossoff in 2018, and then helped bring in the record breaking run-off vote that brought it home for Senator Warnock and Democrats in the Senate, are being denied an opportunity to vote on a cityhood referendum by our loyal Democrat officials. We are writing to you in the hope that you or members of your party can help us find a solution to this problem that will enable us to vote on a referendum to form a new city in November 2022.

Residents in southern DeKalb County want to create a city (<https://cityofdekalbga.com>). The proposed city would have about 295,000 people and, according to the Census, is about 87% Black/African American. Our situation seems a textbook case of discriminatory treatment taking the form of legislative and voter suppression...by Democrats.

- We have been attempting to get a vote since 2014 with a bill introduced in 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018. Then COVID hit. We are asking again in 2021.
- Like all the other cityhood efforts approved for a referendum, we have met all the requirements over the years. Yet, all the other cityhood efforts were approved, whereas we were not. Indeed, a sister community in DeKalb County was sponsored for a second opportunity to vote in 2019 while we still had not (and have not) gotten our first. By preventing or inhibiting legislation from being passed, we have experienced legislative suppression from our elected delegates.
- It is the residents of southern DeKalb county who are supposed to decide whether or not they want a city. However, by not allowing us a vote despite meeting the requirements, our voice has effectively been silenced. We consider this voter suppression.



- Our DeKalb delegation supported the DeKalb County Commissioners' petition in 2016 to delay the vote for 3 unreasonable requests:
  - 1) the vote be held up for 3 years (which has not been requested for any other cityhood effort),
  - 2) the County be allowed to do an impact study (which was not done for any other area trying to form a city), and
  - 3) that the entire county be allowed to vote on the issue (which violates the Georgia constitution).
  
- We have demonstrated community support for a referendum on this initiative.
  - From 2014-2022, we have had over 50 people serve in leadership positions with leaders from most of the largest homeowner associations in southern DeKalb (and Georgia).
  - We hand delivered a petition with over 1,200 names on it to the delegates.
  - We took 40 people to the Capitol in 2016, about 50 people in 2017, and had a citizens' rally with another area that is working on their second attempt to form a city in 2018.
  - We have support from some of the top businesspeople in southern DeKalb county.
  - Our polling indicates 82% of residents believe they should be allowed to vote.
  
- We have even watched two areas (Eagles Landing and now Buckhead) get sponsored even though their efforts constituted a secession from existing cities. The legal, financial, social, and political implications implicit in those efforts are complex and harmful to some groups as compared to the efforts by the group of unincorporated residents in southern DeKalb.
  
- Our large size, which is one of the most important components of our cityhood model to keep taxes down, has been used by some delegation members as a reason for their lack of support despite the fact that a) it meets the requirements, b) it is a solution to the lack of commercial development that besieges Black communities like ours, and c) it goes beyond the boundaries of delegate members to determine that for a reason they don't like, the opportunity to vote should not be given to the people. The residents of southern DeKalb should have the final decision.

At this point, you may be wondering why the residents in southern DeKalb have not been allowed to vote? We believe there are two main reasons. And we say "believe" because the delegation has, for the most part, not sat down and conversed with us physically or virtually.



The first and most prominent reason is that there is a partisan divide on this issue. In general, Republicans support new cities; Democrats oppose them. Democratic opposition stems from the fact that many of these new cities, especially the earlier ones were in mostly wealthy, Republican-majority areas. When new cities pulled their tax revenue from the county, it negatively impacted lower-income and vulnerable areas. However, these same Democrats fail to see that forming a city represents an unparalleled opportunity for economic development in a large, predominantly Black area. It is for this reason that we have support from top businesspeople in southern DeKalb.

The second reason is economic and political. The area of southern DeKalb is gentrifying. Afraid that a large Black city may bring down property values, and because of the way the district lines have been drawn, there has been an organized opposition that threatens the political livelihood of existing candidates.

President Biden, the situation seems to have a natural solution. Let the people vote to decide what they want. However, the opposition openly admits and advocates for no referendum. They are afraid that people will vote to support the city.

As Martin Luther King wrote in his letter from a Birmingham jail, “justice too long delayed is justice denied.” We have respectfully, though determinedly, attempted year after year to simply have the vote. We have reached out to county, state and even federal Democratic leadership. We have done everything we can think to do to converse, negotiate, persuade and educate about why we seek the benefits of forming a city. We have endured disrespectful treatment, avoidance and silence. We have watched as Republicans forcefully support areas that are questionable when it comes to forming a city while our Democratic leaders refuse to support constituents who have properly made their case.

We will no longer stand by while Democrats ask for our vote, we deliver, and then get nothing in recompense. Such a situation lends itself to a feeling of being used. We face two unusually important elections coming up soon in Georgia. One race has a Democratic incumbent currently polling behind his opponent. If we are denied a cityhood referendum vote yet again in this legislative session, please do not come to southern DeKalb asking for our vote. We will be asking people not to allow themselves to continue getting used.

We are loyal Democrats. We are asking for simply one thing – the vote. We are asking for what John Lewis, Martin Luther King, and Rosa Parks fought for. We are asking that lip service stop being offered, and real service be delivered. Specifically, as the leader of the Democratic party, we ask that you intervene so that our DeKalb Democratic delegation gets legislation passed in this 2022 legislative session for us to vote on whether we want a city.



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President of the United States  
February 4, 2022

We think you've been doing a marvelous job. You are a leader and negotiator. Please intercede on behalf of loyal Democrats and help deliver justice.

Thank you for taking the time to read this rather lengthy letter. We would rather err on the side of being thorough in our explanation of the situation rather than leave any misunderstanding.

You can reach us by email at [info@cityofdekalbga.com](mailto:info@cityofdekalbga.com) or by phone at 404-956-0493. We look forward to hearing from you.

Most Respectfully,

The DeKalb Cityhood Movement

cc:

Vice President of the U.S. Kamala Harris  
Majority House Leader Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi  
Majority Senate Leader Senator Chuck Shumer  
Senior Senator of GA Senator Jon Ossoff  
Junior Senator of GA Senator Raphael Warnock  
Congressman for the 5<sup>th</sup> District Hank Johnson  
Congresswoman and Chair of the Georgia Democratic Party Nikema Williams  
Governor-candidate Stacey Abrams  
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