

MEMORANDUM

To: CDF Freedom Schools Family
From: Chris Glaros and Katharine McFarland (CDF Field Organizing Staff)
Date: July 26, 2012
Re: Watch Parties and Voter Registration in September

This memorandum outlines an exciting new way to utilize CDF's Freedom Schools network—scholars, parents, staff, and community partners—to continue registering voters after the close of the Freedom Schools summer.¹ On top of everything else you're doing, you all have been working hard to register voters through our 177 Freedom Schools across 24 states and D.C. To support and finish this work, we envision a two-part campaign comprising: (1) a voter education event centered on national watch parties of the film *Selma, Lord, Selma*; and (2) a massive effort to mobilize and register voters leading up to September 25, 2012, the National Voter Registration Day.

To date, most of our voter registration work has been focused within the six-week 2012 Freedom Schools program, which ends this week in most places. But these efforts cannot stop now. ***We must capture this summer's momentum and continue organizing and leveraging these networks through the fall.***

Children Belong in the Movement

By teaching these young scholars the history of voting and the importance of participating in democracy, we emerge as a unique force: **unlike other organizations doing voter registration, our network of volunteers is composed of children and their families. Our workforce is truly *inter-generational*.** We want to engage and celebrate the youngest members of our community by remembering the role children have had in past movements—and specifically, in the fight to extend voting rights to all people—and by encouraging them to get involved *now*.

The Plan

Selma, Lord, Selma

The film *Selma, Lord, Selma* is a Disney film (1999) that tells the story of “Bloody Sunday” and the fight for voting rights in Selma, Alabama. It is told through the eyes of eight-year-old Sheyann Webb (played by CDF Board member Jurnee Smollett), one of the young activists in the Civil Rights Movement.

¹ Please see attached a memorandum that outlines the voter engagement work CDF Freedom Schools have led this summer.

We would love to work with you and propose:

- The organization of **national watch parties** of this film for the CDF Freedom Schools scholars and their families, as well as Child Action Teams that have been formed this week from the 3,160 people who attended CDF's National Conference in Cincinnati July 22-25.
- The parties would take place on **Sunday, September 2**, in congregations, schools, homes, and—where many Freedom Schools were held in one geographic area such as Columbus, Ohio (with 12) and Charlotte, North Carolina (with 25)—in larger spaces like auditoriums and theaters.
- During the parties, we will have a few **prominent speakers** broadcast to each party—perhaps Ms. Webb herself²—to speak to the attendees about the critical necessity of voter registration work *and the role of children* in social movements.
- We would ask for **specific commitments and goals** from attendees to participate in and organize voter registration efforts in their communities for the month of September, leading up to September 25, the National Voter Registration Day.

National Voter Registration Day

Tuesday, September 25 is National Voter Registration Day, a single day of coordinated field, technology and media efforts to create pervasive awareness of voter registration opportunities—allowing volunteers to reach tens of thousands of voters or more who could not be reached otherwise. The Children's Defense Fund is one of over 100 organizations nationwide who are sponsoring this day of collective social action.³ CDF's Freedom Schools family can come out in full force on this day and in the weeks leading up to it.

Goals

Following in the legacy of the Freedom Schools' tradition, scholars, families, and staff will conduct voter registration work through September in 18 states (states where

² Ms. Webb continues to travel the nation and tell her story of Bloody Sunday. See, for instance: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sheyann_Webb

³ Other organizations include Alliance for Justice, Catholic Charities Community Services, Fair Elections Legal Network, Jewish Family and Children's Services of Minneapolis, Latino Voter Registration Project, League of Women Voters, NAACP Youth and College Division, National Coalition on Black Civic Participation, National Physicians Alliance, Patagonia, Rock the Vote, Women's Intercultural Center, and many more. For a complete list, see <http://nationalvoterregistrationday.org/partners>.

registering voters does not involve undue legal hurdles). We envision that every single one of the Freedom Schools' staff and scholars will each aim to register at least 10 new voters in 2012 from underrepresented populations. This would yield as many as 93,000 newly engaged voters!

Here is a breakdown of the numbers: eliminating states that have enacted new voter registration laws that pose undue hurdles, we have 8,350 students and at least 1,002 staff (average of 6 total staff per 50 students). At 10 registrations per person, we are aiming for 93,520 new voters registered ($8,350 + 1,002 = 9,352 \times 10 = 93,520$).

In the seven states with challenging registration laws—California, Florida, Georgia, Wisconsin, Illinois, Maryland, and Texas—we will still aggressively advertising through grassroots leafleting about the ability for people to register online at www.rockthevote.org, which avoids the legal hurdles imposed on registration drives.

Next Steps

We are excited to work with all 177 CDF Freedom Schools sites to organize terrific watch parties on Sunday, September 2 of *Selma, Lord, Selma* to inspire your scholars and communities to make a difference through registering voters—and to do as much such work as possible, culminating on September 24, National Voter Registration Day!

Will you join us in this nationwide effort?

Please contact Katharine McFarland, CDF Assistant General Counsel and Organizing Coordinator, for more information and assistance with planning: kmcfarland@childrensdefense.org or 614-222-0384.

We look forward to talking with you very soon and having a September to Remember in our Freedom Schools Family!

MEMORANDUM

Re: Children's Defense Fund Voter Engagement Efforts

This memorandum outlines the voter engagement efforts of the Children's Defense Fund this year, centered in CDF's Freedom Schools network and further advanced by our July 22-25 national conference for 3,000 participants in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Historical Context

This summer, as was highlighted during our national training, CDF's Freedom Schools celebrate the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO), a coalition of the major Civil Rights organizations in Mississippi that coordinated voter registration and education efforts. The coalition included SNCC, CORE, NAACP, and SCLC. Two years later, when racial violence had reached new heights in 1964, COFO organized the "Mississippi Freedom Summer Project." This Freedom Summer Project was a major political action program designed to engage Black students and community volunteers in a variety of strategic activities to end the exclusion of Black citizens from the political process, and to ensure citizenship rights for all Mississippians. The framework for Freedom Summer was manifested through over 40 Freedom Schools run throughout the state during the summer of 1964. These schools enrolled over 2,100 students, ranging from the very young to adolescents, and taught lessons on reading instruction, a humanities curriculum emphasizing English, foreign languages, art, and creative writing, and a general mathematics and science curriculum. The schools produced a newspaper, and in many parts of the state, these "Freedom Papers" were the only source of civil rights news. But the primary work of the Freedom Project was a massive, statewide voter registration drive. Students and volunteers hit the streets to engage previously excluded Black voters. Freedom Summer also included the formation of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, which led to reforms that made one of America's two main political parties more inclusive and reflective of the nation's diversity.

Freedom Schools Today

Out of this rich history, the Children's Defense Fund reinvigorated the Freedom Schools movement in 1992. Today CDF operates over 177 Freedom Schools, in 24 states and D.C., which are led by 1,400 college students and staff and serve 12,000 K-12 students. The program provides enrichment through a model curriculum that supports children and families around five essential components: (1) High quality academic enrichment; (2) Parent and family involvement; (3) Social action and civic engagement; (4) Intergenerational servant leadership development; and (5) Nutrition, health and mental health.

Each summer, CDF chooses a different focus for this third component of "social action and civic engagement." In years past, we have led efforts on healthcare advocacy and enrollment, stemming violence through gun control campaigns, combating education

budget cuts, and many other advocacy and community engagement work. This summer, on the 50th anniversary of COFO's foundation, we are focusing on fostering widespread civic engagement through voter registration, education, and mobilization.

Nonpartisan Voter Engagement

This work is, of course, non-partisan. As a 501(c)(3), CDF cannot support or oppose any political party or candidate and our tax status prohibits us from engaging in any partisan activities. Rather, we are committed to shaping a national conversation about children in 2012. And this conversation can happen only when the promise of America's democratic process is realized and all of our voices are heard.

Following in the legacy of the Freedom Schools' tradition, CDF students and staff will conduct voter registration work in 18 states this summer (states where registering voters does not involve undue legal hurdles). We envision that every single one of the Freedom Schools' staff and scholars will aim to register at least 10 new voters from underrepresented populations. This would yield as many as 93,000 newly engaged voters.

Here is a breakdown of the numbers: eliminating states that have enacted new voter registration laws that pose undue hurdles, we have 8,350 students and at least 1,002 staff (average of 6 total staff per 50 students). At 10 registrations per person, we are aiming for 93,520 new voter registrations ($8,350 + 1,002 = 9,352 \times 10 = 93,520$).

In the seven states with challenging registration laws—California, Florida, Georgia, Wisconsin, Illinois, Maryland, and Texas—we are still aggressively advertising through grassroots leafleting about the ability for people to register online at www.rockthevote.org, which avoids the legal hurdles imposed on registration drives.

Each of our Freedom Schools Site Coordinators received a detailed and comprehensive 2 1/2 hour training on how to meet these voter registration goals, and several speakers during the week's training emphasized the importance of this work.

When Freedom Schools close their doors at the end of the summer, CDF's voter engagement efforts will not stop. This summer, CDF is hosting its first national conference in nearly a decade. We expect 3,000 participants at this conference with whom we will create and train Child Action Teams, each of which will commit to registering 10 new voters. At the conference, we will conduct voter registration trainings each day, and each conference participant will receive a CD containing all 50 states' specific voter registration information.

By utilizing our networks created through Freedom Schools and our national conference, CDF is dedicated to the ambitious goal of engaging and empowering nearly 100,000 voters this year.

Voter Suppression

In the face of the changing legal terrain surrounding registration and voting, it is more important than ever before to pursue voter engagement work. Many of these new laws will function as tools for voter suppression, posing additional barriers to those who are routinely excluded from the political process. We have to work in every way possible to compensate for these new hurdles so that no American is left behind and left out of this democracy.

Therefore, every participant at our national conference will also receive state-specific information about these new election laws—those that have passed and those that are pending. Additionally, CDF will provide template letters to elected officials and the media decrying the pernicious effects of these legislative restrictions, including, above all, the continued disenfranchisement of thousands of Americans.

One of the major plenary sessions during the conference is dedicated to these important issues: “Saving Democracy: Creating One America” will be moderated by Wade Henderson, President and CEO of the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, and will also feature Robert Edgar, President and CEO of Common Cause; Barbara Arnwine, Executive Director of the Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law; and Arturo Vargas, Executive Director of the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials. This session will explore the ways in which democracy is under attack, including anti-voter laws—from requiring photo IDs to restricting voter registration—that seek to disenfranchise vulnerable voters, including African Americans, Latinos, low-income Americans, young people and senior citizens.

These new laws undercut the hard-earned civil rights protections fought for by the men, women, and *children* working during the Freedom Summer nearly fifty years ago. We are proud to call the Freedom Summer of 1964 our legacy; but it is also our responsibility to ensure that this work was not in vain. We are, therefore, committed to doing all we can—by registering, educating, and mobilizing new voters in a nonpartisan manner—to continue the work of the original Freedom Schools and to protect the victories that were so hard-won.