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To:

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Subject: (Action Required) Cancel the RNC in Jacksonville

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Dear Mayor and City Council,

My name is Sara Meadow and I was born and raised in Jacksonville. I grew up in Jacksonville, went to grade school in Jacksonville, and many members of my family have been in Jacksonville for generations. While I have a lot of love for the wonderful people and places in Jacksonville, I am disturbed by many recent decisions coming out of the local government - specifically the decision to host the RNC despite continuous calls to cancel it. I've outlined some points below and urge you all to act accordingly.

Ultimately, hosting the RNC will do much more harm to Jacksonville than good; the mayor and city council must call for the convention cancelation immediately.

Following the RNC, we will undoubtedly see a rise in coronavirus cases that will further hamper economic recovery and needlessly endanger lives. Firstly, I want to applaud Mayor Lenny Curry's decision to enforce mandatory mask-wearing where social distancing is not possible. Such a step is imperative for slowing the spread of COVID-19. I trust that this policy will apply to the RNC as well - indoors or outdoors - should it not be canceled. However, I want to emphasize that even with mask-wearing mandates and other safety measures, holding the RNC in Jacksonville in the middle of this pandemic will still endanger hundreds, maybe thousands of Jacksonville residents. Public health experts have made it extremely [clear](#) – the RNC is the perfect storm of conditions that will lead to further COVID spread, more cases, and more deaths even with safety measures. A global COVID hotspot is not the place to hold a large scale convention. Florida is already being touted as [an example of the disastrous consequences of a state opening too early](#) – let's not make that worse.

While hosting the RNC may seem to offer financial or political incentives to current Jacksonville leadership, these gains will not be worth it in the long run. On the surface, hosting the RNC may seem like a boon to the Jacksonville economy with the media attention and visitors flying in for the convention. However, as I detailed above, it is incredibly clear that hosting the convention will lead to an additional spike in coronavirus cases in the Jacksonville area. Greater spikes, in addition to leading to the needless deaths of Jacksonville residents, will also slow our economic recovery. [Leading economists agree](#) – the best way to encourage economic recovery is to slow the spread of the virus as much as possible. We cannot rush this process. Holding an event like the RNC is the anthesis of slowing the spread and saving lives.

Furthermore, as many recent [articles](#) have pointed out, the chaos and hesitancy surrounding the convention means that the economic benefit brought to the city will amount to a fraction of Jacksonville's initial estimates of ~\$100 million. Local news has reported that many serious [legal entanglements and logistical issues](#) with the convention are still up in the air, and as [more donors resist the location change](#), it's becoming clearer that the economic benefits promised to the city will not pan out as expected.

Jacksonville citizens are not on board with the convention's location either. Attorneys and other Jacksonville citizens are currently [suing the city](#) for agreeing to host the RNC. Public concern is growing – people understand the danger that the Jacksonville government is bringing to the city for agreeing to host a national convention in the epicenter of a pandemic. Recent [polls](#) show the vast majority of voters in Jacksonville do NOT want the RNC coming to our city, and 71% are rightfully worried that the RNC will worsen the outbreak. Voters will remember and hold you responsible for the reckless decisions made in critical moments like this.

Hosting the RNC on the anniversary of [Ax Handle Saturday](#) would be an insult to Black Jacksonville residents and the Black Lives Matter movement - the [largest social movement in U.S. history](#). Currently President Trump – a vocal [racist](#) and [critic](#) of the Black Lives Matter movement – is scheduled to accept the Republican presidential nomination on the 60th anniversary of [Ax Handle Saturday](#). Sixty years ago on August 27th, 1960, activists from the NAACP Youth Council were attacked and brutally beaten bloody with ax handles for staging a peaceful sit-in protest. The police largely stood by and let this atrocity happen.

We should remember moments like Ax Handle Saturday in our city's history. We should use them to bring to light the injustices – past and present - faced by Black people in Jacksonville. We should use them as a starting point for conversations regarding current-day issues of JSO brutality, such as the [murder of college student Jamee Johnson at the hands of a JSO officer during a routine traffic stop](#) last December. We should not use this anniversary as a day to focus on a man whose policies and politics actively perpetuate racism and empower white supremacists.

I understand that Mayor Lenny Curry has said that there are a number of metrics the City of Jacksonville is watching to determine the safety of hosting the RNC. According to a recent [First Coast news article](#), the mayor cited widespread community spread and ICU capacity as the metrics he is watching. The mayor also set no target date for making his decision and said he will act “when we get to it”.

I'd like to make it incredibly clear that NOW is the time to “get to it”. On Sunday, Florida [broke the record](#) for the largest one day increase in cases in a state – including New York State in April - by reporting 15,000 cases in a single day. [Duval Country has been clearly marked as an area with “widespread community spread”](#) according to a recent Harvard Global Health Institute analysis. While state data [shows](#) there are currently some ICU beds available in Duval county, ICU beds should not be our only metric for decision making in this critical time. Economic damage is not measured by ICU beds. Insult to the Black community is not measured by ICU beds. Current ICU bed counts don't account for the fact that COVID takes a few weeks to take its toll on a community, and it's likely that our ICU beds will fill up in the weeks following the convention – not before. Open ICU beds ahead of an event do not mean lives will not be needlessly lost.

I urge you - please do the right thing and cancel the RNC event in Jacksonville immediately.

Thank you,
Sara