

November Elections Would Better Serve Our City

In a month, the voters of Colorado Springs will choose their next mayor and city council. Those officials will have a say in numerous aspects of daily life—from sanitation to policing to events funding. They will be elected by a small fraction of voters. And those voters will be disproportionately white.

That's because Colorado Springs chooses to hold its elections in April. These elections have a discriminatory effect on Black and Hispanic residents of the city. So, our organizations sued Colorado Springs under the Voting Rights Act to protect the vote of all Colorado Spring residents and ensure our government accurately represents our *whole* city.

Colorado Springs is just one of three of Colorado's most populous municipalities to hold non-November municipal elections. This unusual practice is detrimental to all Colorado Springs residents—it depresses turnout, especially for Hispanic and Black residents, creates a less responsive government, and wastes taxpayer resources. It is time our municipal election system updates to serve all its residents.

Non-November elections do not remotely represent the Colorado Springs electorate. In 2021, voter turnout for the 2021 municipal election was only 26.87%, and non-white registered voters were only half as likely as white registered voters to vote. That vast disparity doesn't exist in November elections—the gap between turnout rates of white and non-white voters shrinks dramatically.

It's no wonder the City Council isn't responsive to everyone in the city. Studies have repeatedly indicated that local officeholders elected in off-cycle elections are less accountable to their constituents and are more beholden to special interests. November municipal elections would increase accountability between elected officials and their constituents.

And moving elections would save money. April municipal elections are a waste of taxpayer resources. The city must spend additional time, effort, and money to hold municipal elections separate from national November elections. If the city combined its municipal elections with county, state, and federal elections, the city would no longer be forced to devote considerable taxpayer dollars to another election. It makes fiscal sense for our community to consolidate.

Our lawsuit is not partisan. State legislatures and cities spanning political ideology across the country have moved away from non-November elections. The Republican-controlled Arizona legislature and the Democratic-controlled California legislature both passed laws to require November municipal elections. And they worked: turnout has jumped dramatically.

Beyond being bad policy, these elections are illegal. The Voting Rights Act prohibits election policies that discriminate—intentionally or not—against minority voters. The odd timing of elections in Colorado Springs is discriminatory because it impacts the ability of everyone to participate in the political process but especially people of color.

Our organizations are on the front lines, working to register our community to vote and disseminate important information about the elections. We will continue to do the work in our community to empower as many citizens as possible. We believe our lawsuit is a piece of our action. If we prevail, November municipal elections will ultimately enfranchise more citizens.

We can no longer allow the discrimination of The Springs' past to cloud our city's bright future. The Springs is home to world-class outdoor attractions, Army, Air Force, and Space Force bases, Olympic training centers, top-tier colleges, and a dedicated citizenry with a history of civic pride. It is time our election system reflects a diverse forward-looking picture of The Springs.

Signed,

Mike Williams, Citizens Project
Chuck Montoya, Colorado Latinos Vote
Shelly Roehrs, League of Women Voters of the Pikes Peak Region
Eric Carnell, Black/Latino Leadership Coalition

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