



# COMMON GROUND

NOVEMBER 2020 ISSUE



## SHERIFF TOMPKINS CONVENES FORUM TO DISCUSS CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN COMMUNITIES OF COLOR

# SHERIFF'S STATEMENT

NOVEMBER 2020



Greetings,

In this issue of the Common Ground newsletter, we bring attention to the great importance of civic engagement and voter participation with a look at a special two-day forum that I hosted to discuss voting in communities of color, and through the reprinting of an editorial that I wrote, along with two of the participants from that forum.

Under the shadow of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the social unrest around racial injustice and discrimination that has continued in cities across the country, and the resulting economic crisis still griping this nation, civic participation by all Americans of every political party, color, gender, religion and culture is now more crucial than ever.

We also talk about my participation in the Dorchester Bay Economic Development Corporation's celebration of their organization's 41st year of work with residents, organizations and partners to help create and sustain strong, vibrant communities in Dorchester and beyond; and we highlight one of our own community partners, the Home for Little Wanderers in our ongoing "Partner of the Month" series.

I hope that you'll enjoy reading about these and other topics in this edition, and I look forward to bringing you more insight and information about the form and functions of the Department in the issues to come.

**-Sheriff Steven W. Tompkins**

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Sheriff Tompkins was recently honored by the Dorchester Bay Economic Development Corporation during the celebration of the organization's 41st year of service.

### SCSD HIGHLIGHTS PARTNERSHIP WITH "THE HOME FOR LITTLE WANDERERS"



The Department features the Home for Little Wanderers in our ongoing "Partner of the Month" series.

# SHERIFF TOMPKINS, DORCHESTER BAY EDC “RISE TO THE CHALLENGE” IN CELEBRATION OF STRONG, VIBRANT COMMUNITIES



Suffolk County Sheriff Steven W. Tompkins joined special guest Dr. Beverly Daniel Tatum, President Emerita of Spelman College, and the Dorchester Bay Economic Development Corporation to help celebrate the organization’s 41st year of helping to build strong neighborhoods in and around Dorchester.

Dorchester Bay EDC was founded in 1979 by local civic associations to address the problems of economic disinvestment, unemployment, crime, community tensions and the shortage of quality affordable housing undermining Boston’s Dorchester neighborhoods.

Over the past four decades, Dorchester Bay EDC has acted to build a strong, thriving, and diverse community in Boston’s Dorchester neighborhood, working closely with neighborhoods, residents, businesses and partners to access resources to develop & preserve home ownership and rental housing across income levels; create and sustain economic development opportunities for businesses and individuals; and build community through organizing, civic engagement, and leadership development.

The theme of the virtual event was “Dorchester Strong: Rising to the Challenge,” and the organization gave special recognition to Sheriff Tompkins, along with the founder of Stajez Cultural Arts Center, Sophia Haynes-Cardwell.

Thanking the organization for making him one of the night’s honorees, Sheriff Tompkins turned the spotlight back onto Dorchester Bay and the work that they continue to do in the communities of Dorchester, Boston and beyond.

“Dorchester Bay has been bringing it day-in and day-out for our communities for the past 41 years,” said Sheriff Tompkins. “And, I know personally the awesome work that Dorchester Bay has done through the Dorchester Bay Re-entry Program, which provides coaching and pre-release counseling to individuals while incarcerated, supports individuals with ongoing case management, career coaching, and job referrals...things that are crucial to preventing recidivism and key for building successful futures for our returning citizens.”

“I am extremely proud to be honored today by this organization, and I want to thank them for all that they’ve done,” Sheriff Tompkins continued. “I also want to wish them another forty-plus years of success in staying strong and rising to their challenges.”

To learn more about Dorchester Bay Economic Development Corporation, visit: [www.dbedc.org](http://www.dbedc.org).

# SHERIFF TOMPKINS CONVENES PANEL TO DISCUSS VOTER PARTICIPATION AMONG MEN OF COLOR

Suffolk County Sheriff Steven W. Tompkins recently convened a two-day panel featuring men from a diverse array of backgrounds, practices and professions to discuss the need to involve more men of color in the voting process and to talk about some of the barriers to voting that exist in communities of color.

This two-part discussion, moderated by Sheriff Tompkins and titled, “A Conversation About the Need to Increase Voter Participation Among Men of Color,” took place on Monday, October 5th and Tuesday, October 6th and featured two distinguished panels. Monday’s panel included Russell Holmes, State Representative, 6th Suffolk District; Ricky Grant, Chief of Community Engagement for the Suffolk County District Attorney’s Office; Thaddeus Miles, Director of Community Services at MassHousing; Conan Harris, Founder and CEO of CJ Strategies; Segun Idowu, President of the Black Economic Council of Massachusetts; and James Hills, Host of #JavaWithJimmy.

Tuesday’s panel featured Lee Pelton, President of Emerson College; Michael Curry, CEO and General Counsel for Government Affairs and Public Policy for the Government Affairs and Public Policy Division at the Massachusetts League of Community Health Centers; Rahsaan Hall, Director of the Racial Justice Program of the American Civil Liberties Union of Massachusetts; Alberto Vasallo,

Jr., Founder and Publisher of El Mundo Newspaper; Arthur Bernard, Attorney at Travaglini Scorzoni Kiley; and Paul Francisco, Chief Diversity Officer at State Street.

Discussing everything from voter suppression, voter apathy, the Black and Latino vote, voting among women of color, the importance of civic engagement and much more, the two panels proved to be lively, informative and inspirational for both listeners and participants.

“I convened this special two-day event to bring needed focus to the great importance of voting and civic engagement within communities of color,” said Sheriff Tompkins. “I often repeat the famous quote that says, ‘if you don’t vote, you get the government you deserve,’ and this has never been more appropriate than with this year’s election. I want to express my deepest gratitude to all of our panelists for bringing to the table so much food for thought in our discussions, and for potentially inspiring viewers to help us ‘get the government we deserve.’”

To watch both panels, visit the Suffolk County Sheriff’s Department Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/SCSDMA](https://www.facebook.com/SCSDMA) or click: [www.fb.watch/lqEyYiR0\\_J/](https://www.fb.watch/lqEyYiR0_J/) for Day I and for Day II, click: [www.fb.watch/lvSYKp3-kN/](https://www.fb.watch/lvSYKp3-kN/).



# OBSTACLES VS. APATHY: INCREASING VOTER TURNOUT IN COMMUNITIES OF COLOR

By Steven W. Tompkins, Lee Pelton and Michael Curry

*“I have said this before, and I will say it again – the vote is precious. It is almost sacred. It is the most powerful non-violent tool we have in a democracy.”*

— John Lewis, 2019

Spoken by the late, great Congressman from the State of Georgia, nearly a year before his passing and following decades of intense, often dangerous, and deeply impactful struggle for social justice, this statement was delivered as a call to action among people of color, human rights activists and those seeking fairness and equality for their fellow Americans.

When considering our nation’s current state of affairs, Congressman Lewis’ words carry an even more profoundly prescient weight, spoken well ahead of the police killings of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, the murder of Ahmaud Arbery, the national wave of protests which ignited from them and continue as activists clash with both police and members of white supremacist groups emboldened and supported by the current administration, which is itself roiling from its shameful mishandling of a pandemic that has claimed the lives of more than 230,000 Americans, including an horrifically disproportionate number of Black and Brown people.

With this bleak backdrop heading into the final weeks before what many have agreed is “the most important presidential election in recent times,” common wisdom would suggest that an overwhelming majority of affected people would turn out to wield that “most powerful non-violent tool.”

So, why is there so much concern about the potential for lower voter turnout in communities of color, particularly among Black and Latino men? A good portion of the answer lies in the results of the 2016 Presidential Election, when, for the first time in twenty years, the nation saw a drop in the turnout rate for Black voters. According to a Pew Research Center study, the drop was most pronounced among Black men with sixty-four percent of Black women reporting that they voted, compared to fifty-four percent of Black men. A Census report shows that while the voting gap between Black men and Black women decreased slightly in the 2018 midterm elections, men still lagged behind women 54% to 47%. Among Hispanic men and women, the gap was only slightly better, albeit with fewer representatives actually voting, with women turning out at 43% compared to men at 37%.

Certainly, an argument can be made that some aspect of apathy has played into this decline in voter participation, with residents in communities of color asking why they should participate in a system that continues to be rigged against them and offers few candidates who actually represent their interests. But, it is far more likely that it is the system itself that has most significantly impacted the vote in communities of color with a multitude

of voter suppression techniques employed to undercut Black and Latino participation. For some in predominantly Black and Brown communities, and low-income areas, voters run a tiresome gauntlet between gerrymandering to favor the election of White, conservative candidates by “packing” and “cracking” districts to dilute the power of people of color; the intentional and illegal purging of people of color from the voting rolls with unconstitutional “use it or lose it” laws; “exact match” voter ID laws that disproportionately target people of color and those in low-income areas; the continuing assault on Voting Rights Act protections, including the U.S. Supreme Court decision on *Shelby County, Alabama v. Holder*; the arbitrary relocation or closure of polling locations in communities of color; limited voting hours; voter intimidation; and a host of other tactics.

Pouring the cement over this brick wall of voter suppression is the denial of the right to vote for those returning to society post-incarceration. Estimates by the ACLU show that approximately 5.9 million Americans with felony and in several states, misdemeanor convictions are prevented from voting. According to statistics provided by the NAACP, Blacks and Hispanics – who account for just 32% of the U.S. population – make up more than 56% of the nation’s prison population.

So, what can we as citizens do to restore and ensure equality, fairness and, most importantly, faith in our system of voting?

For starters, we need to establish truly non-partisan independent redistricting commissions; standardize the process for voting across the country; make “vote by mail” available to all American citizens in every election; put an end to discriminatory voter ID and “use it or lose it” laws; provide appropriate language translation materials and services; restore the right to vote for all returning citizens across the country; and make Election Day a holiday of national service.

But, the most crucial first step that we need to take as a nation, and particularly in communities of color, is to engage in a little bit of what Congressman Lewis used to call “good trouble” and “wield that most powerful non-violent tool that we have” by coming out to vote this election season.

*Steven W. Tompkins is the Sheriff of Suffolk County, Lee Pelton is the President of Emerson College and Michael Curry is a current member of the National NAACP Board of Directors and the immediate past President of the Boston Branch of the NAACP.*



## **PARTNER OF THE MONTH: Blanca Valentin** of The Home for Little Wanderers

The Suffolk County Sheriff's Department's "Partner of the Month" series highlights the outside agencies and organizations that are working with us to help improve the lives and increase opportunities for the men and women remanded to our care and custody by the courts. Each month, we highlight these collaborations between our organizations and shed some light on some of the ways in which we are readying people to reenter their communities better prepared to provide for themselves and their families.

In this issue's installment of our "Partner of the Month" series, we feature Blanca Valentin who is the Program Director, for The Home for Little Wanderers. The Home for Little Wanderers has been around since 1799, and has evolved into a multi-service agency providing everything from clinical & family support, residential care, special education, and transitional age youth care, just to name a few services offered. The Home operates from two locations, the Hyde Park and Park Street Community Service Agencies (CSAs), which serve young people with Serious Emotional Disturbance (SED) who are enrolled in Mass Health Standard or CommonHealth and meet certain medical criteria. This program is part of the Massachusetts Children's Behavioral Health Initiative (CBHI). The two programs serve Dorchester, South Boston, Hyde Park, Roslindale, Mattapan, and West Roxbury. The Community Service Agency believes that strong families are the cornerstone for strong communities. Their mission is to nurture and empower children and families with mental health needs through culturally sensitive, strength-based, family centered practice. They practice the "wraparound system" of care that focuses on the individual strengths and needs of family members to help them to increase their sense of competence, acquire new skills for managing the special needs of their child and gain access to the resources they need to build effective, ongoing supports.

When asked what makes The Home for Little Wanderers so unique, Blanca stated, "The Home for Little Wanderers is unique because it has been around since 1799 and it's one of the oldest and largest service agencies that caters to ages 0-22 providing a multitude of services. We provide outpatient services in over 100 Boston Public Schools, and we make a positive impact on over 15,000 children and families' lives each year through a wide network of programs. Our 'open door' structure allows children, families and young adults to access services at any point in the continuum of care, based on their needs."

The Home for Little Wanderers' Community Service Agency (CSA) works closely with the Family Matters program here at the Suffolk County Sheriff's Department to help support families that have been impacted by incarceration. Blanca said that, "The partnership that The Home has with Family Matters has helped strengthen the work that we do. The saying 'It takes a village' has never been more true when it comes to working with families and finding them support and resources across different agencies. The Family Matters and The Home for Little Wanderers System of Care Consortium is a great example of a village coming together to not only create an awareness to those impacted by incarceration, but to provide a network of providers to assist in the matter."

The Home for Little Wanderers motto is "Strong Families, Strong Life," and when asked why that motto is so important, Blanca stated, "Family is the foundation to help you grow. Families are resilient and strong. The Home is not a mandated service, so when a family comes in with the desire and wants to be strong, it shows that they are willing to learn a different way to have the power to make their family happier and stronger than before, and we are here to assist every step of the way." For more information, visit: [www.thehome.org](http://www.thehome.org)

# SUFFOLK COUNTY SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT ISSUES WARNING ABOUT NEW TELEPHONE SCAM

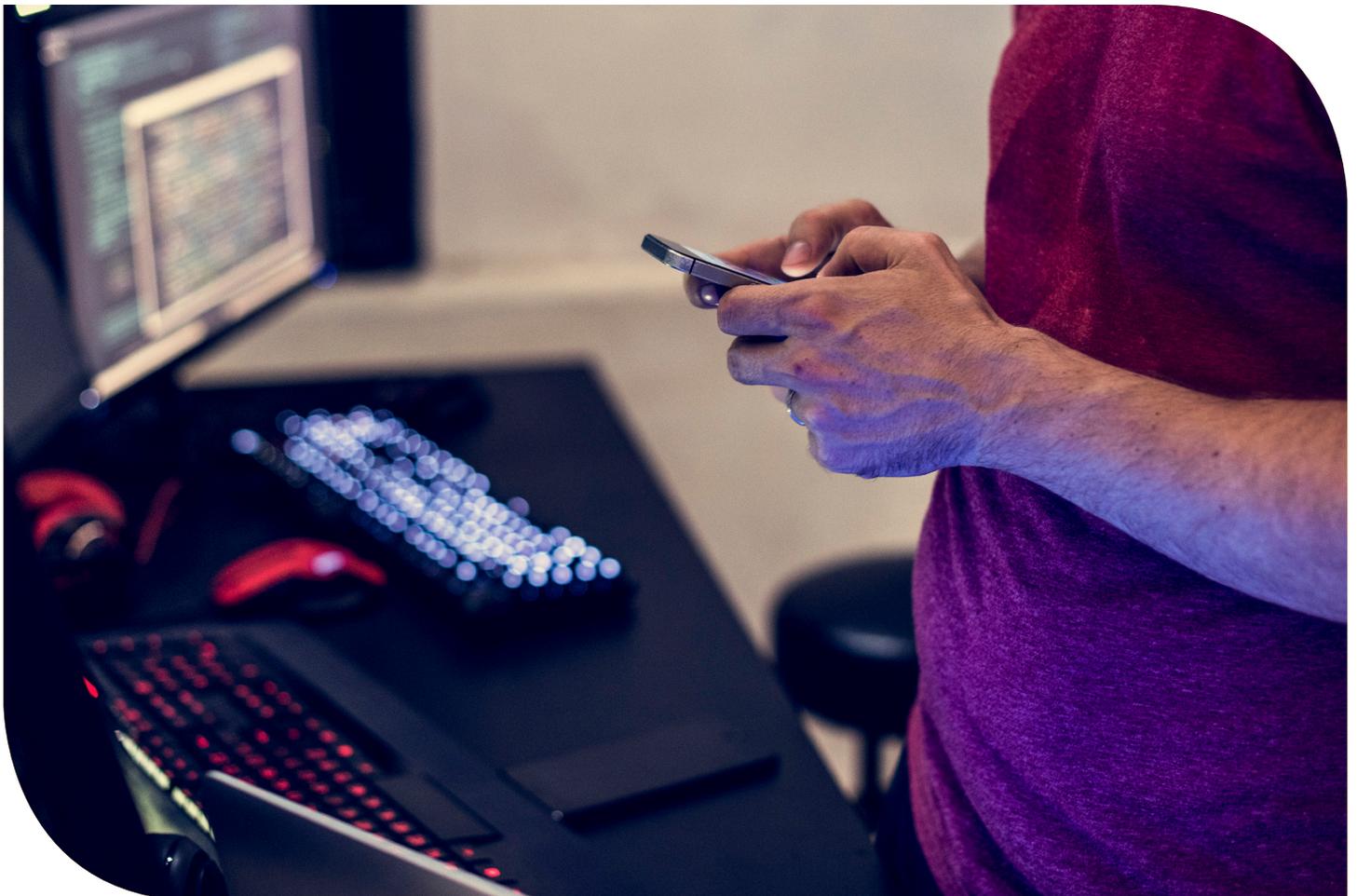
The Suffolk County Sheriff's Department is once again warning citizens to beware of a new telephone scam designed to trick potential victims into sending bail money under the false claim that a family member or friend has been incarcerated inside Department facilities.

The scammer, having obtained personal information about the resident (including the names of some of their relatives, and other pertinent information), calls using technology designed to copy the telephone number at the Department, while pretending to be a family member or friend, and falsely claims that they have been incarcerated at either the Suffolk County Jail or Suffolk County House of Correction. The impersonator then asks their potential victim for bail money to be sent to a Western Union location (or another money-wiring service) so that they can pay their bail and be released. Once the money is transferred to the location requested, the scammer picks up the money and is gone, likely without a trace, before the victim

realizes that they've been targeted.

While one might think that they could easily recognize that the voice on the other end of the call is not that of their loved ones, the scammer is counting on the heightened tension of the call to create enough confusion and anxiety in their victims to get them to act against their better judgement. In an attempt to add authenticity to the call, the imposter offers to let their potential victim speak with an attorney, who they claim to have sitting next to them.

If you receive such a call, residents are urged to end the call and dial the Suffolk County Sheriff's Department directly at (617) 635-1100 to determine whether their loved one is, in fact, in custody, or if they were the target of this telephone scam. The Department also asks that you call the Suffolk County Sheriff's Department Investigative Division (SID) at (617) 704-6514 if you believe you were targeted.





**SHERIFF STEVEN W. TOMPKINS &  
THE SUFFOLK COUNTY SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT**

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