



NAACP New Jersey State Conference

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October 15, 2020

Richard T. Smith
President

Dear Commissioner McCabe,

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The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection recently announced it will be holding a public hearing regarding its remediation plan for Liberty State Park. Unless the DEP has not shared additional information, it appears this is the only public meeting that will take place on the DEP plan. If that is the case, it will merely serve to continue a long history of shutting out communities of color on the decision-making process around the Park.

Given how COVID-19 has crippled minority communities across the state and country, it is understandable that DEP would hold a virtual meeting to discuss their plan. But to hold only one meeting is irresponsible. Surely the DEP must recognize the disparities that communities of color face in terms of being able to access a single virtual meeting. I should not have to point out that such a set-up – and I use that word deliberately – favors well-organized, largely white groups that have dominated the Park conversation for years.

It is beyond hypocritical that just weeks after Governor Murphy signed a law allegedly establishing New Jersey as a leader in environmental justice, DEP would support of a public input process that, as of this moment, provides so many barriers to communities of color being heard.

If the DEP wants to prove me wrong, they should immediately announce a public input process that includes more than just a single meeting. Those additional meetings should be scheduled in coordination with local Jersey City community leaders to ensure they cover all neighborhoods that have a vested interest in the clean-up of the Park. The DEP should also ensure that meetings start at a reasonable time and that comments can be submitted electronically, by phone or by any additional means necessary that allows the community to be heard.

Without these additional steps, the DEP will be perpetuating 40 years of broken promises and outright lies around Liberty State Park. It is time to live up to the environmental justice legislation signed by the governor and guarantee a process that lets the voices of those who have been ignored for too long to finally be heard.

Sincerely,

Richard Smith
President, NAACP New Jersey State Conference