



10/30/20

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Contact: Jeanette Jordan
Cell: 443-459-1615
Email: jeanette.jordan@kaporcenter.org

The Kapor Center Teams Up With City and County Officials To “SMASH the Vote” and Create A New Voter Experience

Officials Commit to Shifting Traditional Narratives and Say the Voting Process in Oakland Can Be “Safeand Fun”

Oakland, CA (October 30, 2020) – Early voter turnout is already breaking records across the country and COVID-19 is creating a voting “*time and space*” sensitivity due to an **87% decrease in polling location availability** (*800 in 2018 to 100 in 2020*) in Alameda County. In response, the Kapor Center, City of Oakland and Alameda County officials are teaming up to eliminate historic and pandemic-related barriers to voting, while also changing the narrative of ‘dreaded, long lines at the polls’ – and they’re doing it inside a large, new polling location in Oakland.

Kapor Center’s annex facilities at 1901 Poplar Street in West Oakland will offer constituents the option to vote in-person or to hand in completed ballots. The annex is **one of only three voting locations in West Oakland** that will provide a secure, well-ventilated and open space (2000 square feet) where *any* Alameda County registered voter can participate since there are **no assigned polling places this year.**

In accordance with new state and county voting guidelines, in person voters will not have to stand in line this election but will alternatively sign in and be entered into a virtual “queue”. Voters will then receive a text message to come inside the voting center to cast their ballot. However, instead of waiting around in their cars or standing outside the voting location with hardly anything to do but stare at a phone screen and bear the discomfort of hunger and thirst while waiting their turn to be let in, ***voters who show up to the Kapor Center’s new accessible voting location in West Oakland, will be able to grab a quick bite to eat from local, BIPOC-owned food truck vendors, enjoy outdoors music, and take in unique artwork crafted by local artists - all while practicing social distancing and carrying out their civic duty.***

“We understand that civic engagement is critical to our democracy and exercising the right to vote in a peaceful, safe and fun environment should be part of the election process for everyone. We are more than excited to work with city and county officials to curate this uplifting experience to increase voter turnout and participation in accordance with social distancing measures and election protocols, while supporting BIPOC-owned businesses negatively impacted by COVID-19, said Allison Scott, CEO of the Kapor Foundation. “We want to do our part to ensure Black and Brown communities are not disenfranchised during this or any other election.”

The event will help ensure voters do not leave the area during the queueing period and miss their window to vote. Poplar St. is one of the only voting centers out of 100 in the county offering such civic engagement entertainment activities.

In a joint statement, Assistant City Administrator LaTonda Simmons and City Clerk Asha Reed said “We are delighted as the City of Oakland, to partner with the Alameda County Registrar of Voters and the Kapor Center for this amazing event.” Administrator Simmons said, “There’s no doubt that the stakes are high for this critical election. That is why it’s important that we reduce barriers to voting, making voting accessible to everyone, especially during a pandemic.” Reed added, “With critical issues on the ballot both locally and nationally, now more than ever, it is important that communities that have been marginalized, engage in their civic duty in their community.”

Voters in communities with historically low voter turnout are expected to show up to the polls in higher numbers this year and given the heightened political, racial and social justice climate, Oakland Mayor Libby Schaaf says increasing public confidence in the electoral process and creating safe, diverse, engaging environments that inspire more people in all communities to exercise their right to vote has never been more critical.

“As a city, we must do everything possible to increase voter participation from our most underrepresented residents. With far fewer polling places this year, I’m thankful the Kapor Center has opened its doors to celebrate democracy and offer a Town-friendly experience, and give our residents more access, more fun, and more pride while we cast our votes,” Mayor Schaaf said.

City officials say the event may well serve as a positive model for this and future elections.

This collaboration is part of the Kapor Center’s **“100 Days of Action for Racial Justice”** and “SMASH the Vote” campaigns, both initiatives are part of an ongoing commitment to fight for racial justice in our political, educational and economic systems.

WHO: Kapor Center (KAY-POR Center)

WHAT: SMASH The Vote Election Day Experience

WHY: Raise awareness of Poplar St. voting center location as a safe, secure, fun polling station within potentially disenfranchised voting populations and change the negative and discouraging narrative around voting.

WHEN: Tuesday, November 3rd, **10 AM - 4 PM**

(normal polling hours 7a - 8pm remain in effect)

WHERE: **1901 Poplar St. West Oakland, CA 94607**

LOGISTICS:

A portion of Poplar street will be closed off for this event to support the flow of traffic for official drive by ballot drop activities.

**A socially distanced staging area will be available for media personnel*

###

About Kapor Center:

Kapor Center aims to enhance diversity and inclusion in the technology and entrepreneurship ecosystem through increasing access to tech and STEM education programs, conducting research on access and opportunity in computing, investing in community organizations and gap-closing social ventures, and increasing access to capital among diverse entrepreneurs. Learn more about Kapor Center at: <https://www.kaporcenter.org/>