

December 14, 2021

Dr. Alexandre Magalhaes  
Members of the Bristol-Plymouth Regional Technical School Committee  
207 Hart Street  
Taunton, MA 02780

Dear Dr. Magalhaes and Members of the Bristol-Plymouth School Committee:

We are writing to you regarding the district-wide referendum set for January 29, 2022 for the Bristol-Plymouth school construction project. We understand the need to comply with the 120-day requirement to secure local funding authorizations. However, this date poses a serious threat to voters' rights to a fair and equitable election. It is under this principle that we respectfully appeal to you to request an extension from the MSBA and reschedule the referendum to the springtime.

Although our communities face numerous obstacles in organizing a referendum to be held in January, the overriding concern is voter education and access. The district-wide referendum encompasses seven communities with approximately 106,626 voters. A referendum in January will not allow sufficient time to provide comprehensive information to voters so that they may fully understand the scope of the project and the financial impact it will have on taxpayers.

As City and Town officials, we have an obligation to provide our constituents with this information in an understandable, transparent and timely manner. The date of January 29th significantly hinders our ability to maximize community outreach. Two major holidays within the next three weeks and an additional holiday in mid-January pose further limitations on the ability to do this. Expecting voters to participate in a referendum in which they have not been fully informed is a true disservice to our citizens.

Moreover, there are several logistical concerns with conducting a referendum this January that include staffing issues, consequences due to potential inclement weather, and executing the necessary actions associated with state-mandated re-precincting. The details of these concerns were voiced several times to the project team and School Committee to no avail.

On November 15th, a meeting was hosted at Bristol-Plymouth seeking input from the election officials from each community. All of the concerns referenced above were discussed in depth. Letters were also sent to the School Committee detailing the many complications associated with a referendum this winter.

While election officials from each of the seven member communities who attended the November 15th meeting stated a January 29th election was *possible*, they strongly advocated for holding the referendum in the spring. Election officials believed that an extension would be requested and were optimistic that a decision would be made that was mutually agreeable and equitable for all parties involved and, ultimately, in the best interest of the voters.

None of these concerns were addressed when the date of the referendum was voted on. Representatives from three member communities attended the December 1st School Committee meeting but were not recognized prior to the vote as Public Comments were accepted only at the end of the meeting. To allow input only after a vote is taken creates the perception that input was not considered important to the School Committee.

We are seeking an extension of the MSBA deadline so that the referendum may be rescheduled for springtime, maximizing the full eight hours allowed by statute for polling hours. It is our understanding that the extension request must be made by the school itself and not the district members. This extension would need to be obtained as soon as possible to ensure that our communities have sufficient time to adequately prepare for the referendum.

We ask that you honor our partnership and demonstrate your commitment to the communities that support you by working with us to ensure a fair and equitable process for the residents and voters of our cities and towns.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Shaunna O'Connell  
Mayor, City of Taunton

Kenneth J. Pacheco  
Chairman, Dighton Board of Selectmen

Heather Martin-Sterling  
Town Administrator, Town of Berkley