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The Democratic Candidates' Positions on School Diversity & Related Educational Equity Issues (updated November 12, 2019)

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The first set of Democratic presidential debates in June brought to the spotlight issues of school diversity and equity, as Senator Kamala Harris asserted the importance of school integration, based on her own experience growing up in Berkeley, California, and criticized Vice President Biden for his anti-busing positions (and collaborations) in the 1970s.

Coincidentally, the debate came at a time when the National Coalition on School Diversity (NCSd) and a growing school diversity movement both inside and outside government are pushing to remove these last remaining vestiges from the “anti-busing” years – blanket prohibitions on the use of federal funds for student transportation to support integration. Last year, with bipartisan support, two perennial anti-busing budget riders attached to the federal budget were removed.⁴ And this year, there is growing support in Congress to remove the final anti-busing provision, section 426 of the General Education Provisions Statute, originally passed in 1974.⁵ This effort is part of a broader federal policy agenda of the school integration movement, reflected in the NCSd’s federal policy priorities for 2019, including removal of Section 426, passage of the Strength in Diversity competitive grants program, expanded funding for the Magnet Schools Assistance Program, for interdistrict school planning, and for the Equity Assistance Centers (which assist local districts in school integration planning).⁶ NCSd has also called for reinstatement of the 2011 school diversity guidance letter, reinstatement of the school integration incentives for Department of Education competitive grant funds, and linking the Magnet Schools Assistance Program with HUD’s Choice Neighborhoods public housing redevelopment program.⁷ A number of these policy proposals are part of the candidates’ education platforms, which are reviewed in this brief. Notably, four of the Democratic presidential candidates (Warren, Sanders, Harris, and Booker) have already endorsed the Strength in Diversity Act.

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⁴ See <https://school-diversity.org/press-release-40-organizations-join-ncsd-in-requesting-removal-of-anti-integration-riders/>

⁵ Section 426 of General Education Provisions Act (GEPA) states that: “*No funds appropriated for the purpose of carrying out any applicable program may be used for the transportation of students or teachers (or for the purchase of equipment for such transportation) in order to overcome racial imbalance in any school or school system, or for the transportation of students or teachers (or for the purchase of equipment for such transportation) in order to carry out a plan of racial desegregation of any school or school system...*”

⁶ https://school-diversity.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/NCSD_Policy-Doc_Final3.pdf

⁷ Id.

The Candidates

Senator Bernie Sanders has offered one of the most comprehensive approaches to school diversity. His list of proposals includes increasing federal funding for community-driven strategies to desegregate schools, funding school transportation and ending funding penalties for schools that attempt to desegregate, enforcing desegregation orders, and appointing federal judges who will enforce the 1964 Civil Rights Act in schools.⁸ Former Vice President Joe Biden has promised to reinstate Department of Education guidance supporting desegregation⁹ and plans to provide grants to school districts that pursue integration,¹⁰ a program developed by President Obama’s Secretary of Education, John King, that was subsequently canceled by Secretary Betsy DeVos.¹¹ Former HUD Secretary Julián Castro’s website links housing and school segregation and pledges that he will “combat racial segregation in schools and reduce educational disparities by working to integrate communities.”¹² Most of the candidates who have weighed in on school integration also have well-developed educational equity platforms – Castro, for example, calls for investments in pre-K and teacher salaries, addressing funding disparities, and ending the school-to-prison pipeline.¹³

Senator Kamala Harris does not have an issues section on her campaign website dedicated specifically to school diversity, but her platform on racial justice includes a promise to “inject billions of federal dollars into schools serving students of color,” based on her recognition that, “65 years after *Brown v. Board*, opportunity is still denied and educational segregation is getting worse.”¹⁴

Senator Amy Klobuchar recently posted a Tweet commemorating the anniversary of *Brown v. Board*, noting that there is still “a long way to go.”¹⁵ However, unlike other candidates, she does not make any mention of the issue on her website, except to say that her first 100 days as President would include a “historic investment in public education” to “close the opportunity gap,” among other things.¹⁶

Senator Warren co-sponsored the Strength in Diversity Act, which would “award competitive grants for the development or implementation of plans to improve diversity or eliminate socioeconomic or racial isolation in public schools.”¹⁷ Her education plan promises to fund

⁸ Bernie Sanders, *A Thurgood Marshall Plan for Public Education*, <https://berniesanders.com/a-thurgood-marshall-plan-for-public-education> (last visited June 27, 2019)

⁹ See <https://school-diversity.org/picsguidance/>.

¹⁰ Joe Biden, *Joe’s Plan for Educators, Students, and Our Future*, <https://joebiden.com/education> (last visited June 27, 2019)

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¹² Julián Castro, *People First Education*, <https://issues.juliancastro.com/people-first-education> (last visited June 28, 2019)

¹³ Id.

¹⁴ Kamala Harris, *Fighting For Racial Justice*, <https://kamalaharris.org/issue/fighting-for-racial-justice/> (last visited November 12, 2019)

¹⁵ Amy Klobuchar (@amyklobuchar), Twitter (May 13, 2019, 11:34 AM), <https://twitter.com/amyklobuchar/status/1128005517958352898>

¹⁶ Amy Klobuchar, *Issues*, <https://amyklobuchar.com/issues/> (last visited November 12, 2019); <https://medium.com/@AmyforAmerica/amys-first-100-days-b7adf9f91262> (last visited November 12, 2019)

¹⁷ Strength in Diversity Act of 2018, H.R. 6722, 115th Cong. (2018)

schools equitably and renew the fight against segregation in schools.¹⁸ Specifically, Warren suggests strengthening Title VI so that the government can challenge policies that disproportionately harm students of color, revive and fund the Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights, implement heightened scrutiny for “breakaway” school districts, and improve federal data collection to support better outcomes for students.¹⁹

Mayor Pete Buttigieg’s “Schools of the Future” plan promises to address inadequate resources, teacher shortages, and discriminatory disciplinary policies that affect students of color.²⁰

One area of debate has been the issue of school choice and the various educational options that fall underneath. School choice covers a wide range of K-12 options beyond the traditional public school system, including charter schools, magnet schools, private schools, and school vouchers.²¹ Only Senator Cory Booker has endorsed the concept of school choice in a general way.²² Within the school choice framework, candidates have largely ignored the question of magnet schools.

Charter schools, which are among the most segregated schools in the U.S.,²³ have received more attention and at times been the subject of intense debate. Some candidates have already taken positions on the issue as legislators. Warren opposed a ballot initiative in Massachusetts that would have allowed more charter schools in the state.²⁴ Conversely, Booker was a champion of charter schools as a New Jersey Senator and, since announcing his presidential bid, has maintained his stance that some charter school models work.²⁵ Several candidates are categorically opposed to for-profit charter schools, including Sanders and Warren.²⁶ Sanders also advocates for a moratorium on public funds to all charter schools in order to assess their impact and increased accountability if charter schools are allowed to continue operating.²⁷ And Warren’s plan would subject charter schools to more transparency requirements, stop the diversion of public dollars from traditional public schools through vouchers and tax credits, and

¹⁸ Elizabeth Warren, *A Great Public School Education for Every Student*, <https://elizabethwarren.com/plans/public-education> (last visited November 12, 2019)

¹⁹ Elizabeth Warren, *A Great Public School Education for Every Student*, <https://elizabethwarren.com/plans/public-education> (last visited November 12, 2019)

²⁰ Pete Buttigieg, *Equitable Public Education*, <https://peteforamerica.com/issues/#EquitablePublicEducation> (last visited November 12, 2019)

²¹ What is School Choice?, <https://www.edchoice.org/school-choice/what-is-school-choice/> (last visited June 27, 2019)

²² Patrick Wall, *Cory Booker has been an ed reform favorite. That could be a problem for his 2020 campaign.*, Chalkbeat (Feb. 1, 2019), <https://www.chalkbeat.org/posts/us/2019/02/01/cory-booker-education-reform/>; Nic Garcia, *Colorado U.S. Sen. Michael Bennet: DeVos ‘wrong’ about school choice in Denver*, Chalkbeat (Mar. 30, 2017), <https://www.chalkbeat.org/posts/co/2017/03/30/colorado-u-s-sen-michael-bennet-devos-wrong-about-school-choice-in-denver/>; Seth Moulton (@sethmoulton), Twitter (Oct. 17, 2017, 7:57 PM), <https://twitter.com/sethmoulton/status/920483905005867013>

²³ Ivan Moreno, *US charter schools put growing numbers in racial isolation*, Associated Press (Dec. 3, 2017), <https://www.apnews.com/e9c25534dfd44851a5e56bd57454b4f5>

²⁴ Spencer Buell, *Elizabeth Warren Won’t Support Charter School Expansion*, Boston Magazine (Sept. 27, 2016), <https://www.bostonmagazine.com/news/2016/09/27/elizabeth-warren-charter-schools/>

²⁵ Emily Larsen, *Cory Booker breaks with Bernie Sanders over charter schools*, Washington Examiner (May 25, 2019), <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/news/cory-booker-breaks-with-bernie-sanders-over-charter-schools>

²⁶ Bernie Sanders, *A Thurgood Marshall Plan for Public Education*, <https://berniesanders.com/a-thurgood-marshall-plan-for-public-education/> (last visited June 27, 2019); Naomi Lin, *Elizabeth Warren: For-profit charter schools are ‘a real problem’*, Washington Examiner (May 18, 2019), <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/news/elizabeth-warren-for-profit-charter-schools-are-a-real-problem>

²⁷ Bernie Sanders, *A Thurgood Marshall Plan for Public Education*, <https://berniesanders.com/a-thurgood-marshall-plan-for-public-education/> (last visited June 27, 2019)

ban for-profit charter schools entirely.²⁸ Biden opposes federal funding to for-profit charter schools but has not gone so far as to say he would eliminate them altogether.²⁹

Candidates have released proposals on other educational equity goals, ranging from increasing funding to schools that serve low-income students to universal pre-kindergarten. Joe Biden and Bernie Sanders have committed to tripling funding to Title I schools,³⁰ which have “high numbers or high percentages of children from low-income families.”³¹ Elizabeth Warren plans to quadruple Title I funding, conditioned on more state contributions and state adoption of progressive funding formulas and appropriate allocations to schools and districts.³² Pete Buttigieg and Kamala Harris have also committed to increasing federal aid to public schools serving low-income students, though they have not said by how much.³³ In her proposal, Harris pointed out that almost 45 percent of Black and Latinx students attend the schools that would receive the additional investments she proposes.³⁴

A number of candidates have said the best way to improve education for low-income students is to invest in their teachers. Biden says increasing funding to Title I schools will do just that, and Booker promises to “invest in teachers by raising pay, eliminating student debt, and providing financial assistance for teacher certification and licensing” but does not offer further details about what those investments might look like.³⁵ But several candidates want to go further. Sanders plans to set a nationwide starting salary for teachers at \$60,000.³⁶ Harris’ priority is to close the teacher pay gap - the difference between what public school educators and comparable workers are paid.³⁷ Under her plan, the federal government would provide the first 10 percent of funding to close that gap. The plan would then incentivize states to invest in closing the remainder by providing federal funds to match state contributions, ultimately raising teacher pay by 23 percent.³⁸ Castro wants to fund teacher residency programs, which would be prioritized in “high-need, underserved communities,” and provide grants to people who want to pursue careers

²⁸ Elizabeth Warren, *A Great Public School Education for Every Student*, <https://elizabethwarren.com/plans/public-education> (last visited November 12, 2019)

²⁹ Katie Glueck, *Joe Biden Debuts Education Plan, Then Touts It to Teachers’ Union*, *New York Times* (May 28, 2019), <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/28/us/politics/biden-education-plan-2020.html>

³⁰ Bernie Sanders, *A Thurgood Marshall Plan for Public Education*, <https://berniesanders.com/a-thurgood-marshall-plan-for-public-education/> (last visited June 27, 2019); Joe Biden, *Joe’s Plan for Educators, Students, and Our Future*, <https://joebiden.com/education/> (last visited June 27, 2019)

³¹ U.S. Dep’t of Educ., *Improving Basic Programs Operated by Local Educational Agencies (Title I, Part A)* (Oct. 24, 2018), <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/titleiparta/index.html>

³² Elizabeth Warren, *A Great Public School Education for Every Student*, <https://elizabethwarren.com/plans/public-education> (last visited November 12, 2019)

³³ Pete Buttigieg, *Schools of the Future*, <https://peteforamerica.com/policies/douglass-plan/#SchoolsoftheFuture> (last visited November 12, 2019); Kamala Harris, *AMERICA’S TEACHERS DESERVE A RAISE*, <https://kamalaharris.org/teachers/> (last visited June 28, 2019);

³⁴ Kamala Harris, *AMERICA’S TEACHERS DESERVE A RAISE*, <https://kamalaharris.org/teachers/> (last visited November 12, 2019)

³⁵ Joe Biden, *Joe’s Plan for Educators, Students, and Our Future*, <https://joebiden.com/education/> (last visited June 27, 2019); Cory Booker, *Public Education*, <https://corybooker.com/issues/public-education/> (last visited November 12, 2019)

³⁶ Bernie Sanders, *A Thurgood Marshall Plan for Public Education*, <https://berniesanders.com/a-thurgood-marshall-plan-for-public-education/> (last visited June 27, 2019)

³⁷ Tim Walker, *Teacher Pay Gap Reaches a Record High*, *NEA Today* (Sept. 6, 2018), <http://neatoday.org/2018/09/06/teacher-pay-gap-reaches-record-high/>

³⁸ Kamala Harris, *AMERICA’S TEACHERS DESERVE A RAISE*, <https://kamalaharris.org/teachers/> (last visited June 28, 2019)

in teaching.³⁹ Warren plans to permanently raise teacher pay, make it easier for teachers to unionize, and wipe out debt for teachers.⁴⁰ Representative Tulsi Gabbard has publicly expressed her support for increases in teacher pay but has not revealed any specific proposals on the issue.⁴¹

Several candidates have emphasized the need to increase teacher diversity – Biden said he will invest in recruiting teachers of color, and Sanders, Harris, Warren, and Castro have proposed limited plans which would target higher education educators at HBCUs and minority-serving institutions.⁴² Harris has also stated that her plan is designed to “build a pipeline of teachers of color,” citing the fact that if a black child has a black teacher by third grade, it makes them 13 percent more likely to go to college.⁴³ Warren’s plan would invest \$50 billion in HBCUs and MSIs to help more people of color become educators and school leaders.⁴⁴ Buttigieg plans to require transparency around teacher hiring procedures that would prioritize teacher diversity as part of the Every Student Succeeds Act School Improvement plans, and to invest Title II dollars into recruiting and training teachers of color.⁴⁵

Several candidates have addressed the fact that students of color are disciplined at higher rates and face harsher punishments than white students.⁴⁶ Klobuchar has stated she would re-issue guidance to schools to address the disparity.⁴⁷ Castro has advocated for an end of the school-to-prison pipeline by combating “unfair, harsh, and unequal disciplinary methods” and requiring schools to implement relevant reforms to receive federal funding.⁴⁸ On his website, Sanders says he will “[a]ddress disciplinary practices in schools that disproportionately affect Black and Brown children.”⁴⁹ And Warren’s website states that zero-tolerance disciplinary policies

³⁹ Julián Castro, *People First Education*, <https://www.julianforthefuture.com/news-events/people-first-education/> (last visited June 28, 2019).

⁴⁰ Elizabeth Warren, *A Great Public School Education for Every Student*, <https://elizabethwarren.com/plans/public-education> (last visited November 12, 2019)

⁴¹ Tulsi Gabbard (@TulsiGabbard), Twitter (May 7, 2019), <https://twitter.com/TulsiGabbard/status/1125914320196505601>

⁴² Joe Biden, *Joe’s Plan for Educators, Students, and Our Future*, <https://joebiden.com/education/> (last visited June 27, 2019); Bernie Sanders, *A Thurgood Marshall Plan for Public Education*, <https://berniesanders.com/a-thurgood-marshall-plan-for-public-education/> (last visited June 27, 2019); Julián Castro, *People First Education*, <https://www.julianforthefuture.com/news-events/people-first-education/> (last visited June 28, 2019); Elizabeth Warren, *A Great Public School Education for Every Student*, <https://elizabethwarren.com/plans/public-education> (last visited November 12, 2019); Kamala Harris, *Fighting for Racial Justice*, <https://kamalaharris.org/issue/fighting-for-racial-justice/> (last visited November 12, 2019)

⁴³ Kamala Harris, *Fighting for Racial Justice*, <https://kamalaharris.org/issue/fighting-for-racial-justice/> (last visited November 12, 2019)

⁴⁴ Elizabeth Warren, *A Great Public School Education for Every Student*, <https://elizabethwarren.com/plans/public-education> (last visited November 12, 2019)

⁴⁵ Pete Buttigieg, *Schools of the Future*, <https://peteforamerica.com/policies/douglas-plan/#SchoolsoftheFuture> (last visited November 12, 2019).

⁴⁶ Anne Gregory et al., *The Achievement Gap and the Discipline Gap: Two Sides of the Same Coin?*, American Educational Research Association, 3 (Nov. 2, 2009), <http://www.indiana.edu/~atlantic/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/Gregory-et-al.-The-Achievement-Gap-and-the-Discipline-Gap-Two-Sides-of-the-Same-Coin.pdf>

⁴⁷ Amy Klobuchar, *Senator Amy Klobuchar Releases Plan of More Than 100 Actions for Her First 100 Days as President*, Medium (June 18, 2019), <https://medium.com/@AmyforAmerica/amys-first-100-days-b7adf9f91262>

⁴⁸ Julián Castro, *People First Education*, <https://www.julianforthefuture.com/news-events/people-first-education/> (last visited June 28, 2019)

⁴⁹ Bernie Sanders, *A Thurgood Marshall Plan for Public Education*, <https://berniesanders.com/a-thurgood-marshall-plan-for-public-education/> (last visited June 27, 2019)

disproportionately hurt students of color and can serve as the entry point to the school-to-prison pipeline.⁵⁰ Her plan would encourage schools to adopt restorative justice programs and would issue guidance to limit the use of discriminatory dress codes that target students of color.⁵¹ Buttigieg mentions on his website that discriminatory disciplinary policies feed the school-to-prison pipeline and disproportionately deny educational opportunities to students of color, but does not delve into further detail addressing school discipline.⁵²

Educational equity has also come up around access to early childhood education and school meals. Many candidates have recognized the need for expanded access to early childhood education. Biden, Warren, and Yang advocate for universal pre-kindergarten.⁵³ John Delaney authored two (unsuccessful) bills to expand universal pre-kindergarten as a Maryland Representative.⁵⁴ Sanders and Castro have committed to providing free breakfast and lunch in public schools to ensure students do not go hungry.⁵⁵ Booker has also committed to providing universal early childhood education, though his website does not go into detail regarding whether early childhood extends to Pre-K, and what a universal provision would look like.⁵⁶

The only candidate that mentions school curriculum in their education plan is Pete Buttigieg, whose website states that “Black history, in general, and slavery, in particular, is poorly taught throughout the United States.”⁵⁷ His plan commits to promoting the education and celebration of Black history in public schools by increasing funding to the National Endowment for the Arts aimed at documentation of Black history and culture, preserving cultural and historic sites documenting Black history, and writing a “Dear Colleague” letter outlining best practices for instruction of inclusive Black history in K-12 curricula.⁵⁸

A number of candidates have also released housing proposals which would inevitably impact racial compositions of neighborhoods and therefore schools, whether they offer that as a stated reason for the policy or not. PRRAC released an analysis of these fair housing positions in July.⁵⁹ Warren’s plan is the most substantial; for example, she wants to provide down-payment

⁵⁰ Elizabeth Warren, *A Great Public School Education for Every Student*, <https://elizabethwarren.com/plans/public-education> (last visited November 12, 2019)

⁵¹ Elizabeth Warren, *A Great Public School Education for Every Student*, <https://elizabethwarren.com/plans/public-education> (last visited November 12, 2019)

⁵² Pete Buttigieg, *Schools of the Future*, Pete Buttigieg, *Schools of the Future*, <https://peteforamerica.com/policies/douglass-plan/#SchoolsoftheFuture> (last visited November 12, 2019).

⁵³ Joe Biden, *Joe’s Plan for Educators, Students, and Our Future*, <https://joebiden.com/education/> (last visited June 27, 2019); Andrew Yang, *EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION FOR ALL*, <https://www.yang2020.com/policies/early-childhood-education/> (last visited June 28, 2019); Elizabeth Warren, *Universal Child Care*, <https://elizabethwarren.com/plans/universal-child-care> (last visited November 12, 2019)

⁵⁴ Press Release, U.S. Congressman John Delaney (July 27, 2017), <https://web.archive.org/web/20181222193258/https://delaney.house.gov/news/press-releases/delaney-re-introduces-legislation-to-give-parents-nationwide-option-to-enroll>

⁵⁵ Bernie Sanders, *A Thurgood Marshall Plan for Public Education*, <https://berniesanders.com/a-thurgood-marshall-plan-for-public-education/> (last visited June 27, 2019); Julián Castro, *People First Education*, <https://www.julianforthefuture.com/news-events/people-first-education/> (last visited June 28, 2019)

⁵⁶ Cory Booker, *Public Education*, <https://corybooker.com/issues/public-education/> (last visited November 12, 2019)

⁵⁷ Pete Buttigieg, *Schools of the Future*, Pete Buttigieg, *Schools of the Future*, <https://peteforamerica.com/policies/douglass-plan/#SchoolsoftheFuture> (last visited November 12, 2019).

⁵⁸ Pete Buttigieg, *Schools of the Future*, Pete Buttigieg, *Schools of the Future*, <https://peteforamerica.com/policies/douglass-plan/#SchoolsoftheFuture> (last visited November 12, 2019).

⁵⁹ <https://prrac.org/the-2020-democratic-candidates-positions-on-affordable-housing-and-fair-housing-issues/>

assistance to first-time homebuyers who live in “formerly redlined neighborhoods that were segregated by law and are still currently low-income,”⁶⁰ as part of a plan to address a current system that locks families of color “out of neighborhoods with better schools and job opportunities.”⁶¹ Castro, as former HUD Secretary, also strongly emphasizes fair housing, stating that a progressive housing policy must “include affirmatively furthering fair housing.”⁶² Castro’s plan also includes a promise to prohibit discrimination in education based on perceived or actual housing status.⁶³ Sanders’ housing plan, which would invest \$1.48 trillion over ten years in the National Affordable Housing Trust Fund, also acknowledges that the uptick in evictions and housing instability can lead to “an unacceptable disruption in a child’s education.”⁶⁴ Others including Klobuchar, Booker, and Buttigieg also address racial segregation in housing in their official platforms,⁶⁵ but their positions don’t clearly connect the issues of public education and housing.

Since PRRAC last released summaries of candidates’ school diversity plans in June, more candidates have proposed public education plans that promise to address the issue of school diversity and integration, and those who were speaking about school diversity from the beginning have continued to expand their proposals. With more Democratic debates scheduled for 2019 and the first set of primary contests quickly approaching, we hope that voters and public education stakeholders will continue to push the remaining candidates to commit to promoting diversity and equity in schools.

⁶⁰ Elizabeth Warren, *My Housing Plan for America*, Medium (Mar. 16, 2019), <https://medium.com/@teamwarren/my-housing-plan-for-america-20038e19dc26>

⁶¹ *Id.*; Elizabeth Warren, *A Great Public School Education for Every Student*, <https://elizabethwarren.com/plans/public-education> (last visited November 12, 2019)

⁶² Julián Castro, *People First Education*, <https://www.julianforthefuture.com/news-events/people-first-education/> (last visited June 28, 2019)

⁶³ Julián Castro, *People First Housing*, <https://issues.juliancastro.com/people-first-housing/> (last visited November 12, 2019)

⁶⁴ Bernie Sanders, *Housing for All*, <https://berniesanders.com/issues/housing-all/> (last visited November 12, 2019)

⁶⁵ Amy Klobuchar, *Shared Prosperity and Economic Justice*, <https://amyklobuchar.com/issues/shared-prosperity-and-economic-justice/> (last visited June 28, 2019); Pete Buttigieg, *Affordable Housing*, <https://peteforamerica.com/issues/#AffordableHousing>

(last visited November 12, 2019); Cory Booker, *Housing*, <https://corybooker.com/issues/housing/> (last visited November 12, 2019); Cory Booker, *Cory’s Plan to Provide Safe, Affordable Housing for All Americans*, <https://medium.com/@corybooker/corys-plan-to-provide-safe-affordable-housing-forall-americans-da1d83662baa> (last visited November 12, 2019)