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No Public Forum for County Executive Candidates Prior to Election

St. Louis County residents will go to the polls in early August to decide between two candidates in the Democratic primary for St. Louis County Executive – but only one was willing to participate in a public forum. Unfortunately, incumbent County Executive Steve Stenger did not respond to the invitation to take part in a public forum organized by a coalition of community-based organizations. His challenger, Mark Mantovani, did agree to participate and responded to a set of questions guiding the forum. The winner of this primary election is expected to become the new County Executive. Voters will cast their ballots on August 7, 2018 without having had the opportunity to hear from candidates in an open dialogue.

The Social Policy and Electoral Accountability Collaborative (SPEAC) scheduled a forum for Wednesday, July 25 that was designed to provide candidates with an opportunity to have an open discussion with the community, but could not get a response from Mr. Stenger's office as to whether he would participate. The SPEAC forum could have been a critical opportunity for citizens to interact with the candidates on important issues that face our region – such as child and youth well-being, health disparities, economic opportunity, neighborhood improvement, and racial equity. Recognizing the vital importance of voter access and education, SPEAC held one of the [largest mayoral forums in 2017](#) for the City of St. Louis. Hundreds of citizens had a chance to hear from candidates on pressing regional issues identified by the community and in the Ferguson Commission report. SPEAC was aiming to create a similar platform for citizens to engage with the St. Louis County executive candidates.

SPEAC believes that platforms like these matter. As David Dwight, who is representing Forward Through Ferguson in the collaborative, asserted, "There are few things more core to the health of our local democracy than the right of residents to interact with those who seek to represent our community in public office."

The Social Policy and Electoral Accountability Collaborative (SPEAC) is a group of leading St. Louis area organizations that strives to hold elected officials accountable to the communities they represent, or are seeking to represent, both prior to an election and afterward. This Collaborative is comprised of the following organizations: Beyond Housing, Clark-Fox Policy Institute at Washington University in St. Louis, Community Builders Network of Metro St. Louis, St. Louis Equal Housing and Community Reinvestment Alliance, Forward Through Ferguson, FOCUS St. Louis, Generate Health, Health Equity Works (formerly For the Sake of All), Ready by 21 St. Louis, Social Innovation St. Louis, St. Louis Area Foodbank, Trailnet, and Vision for Children at Risk.