

TESTIMONY
presented by
Laura Wood, Chief Democracy Officer, DemocracyNYC
Office of the Deputy Mayor for Strategic Policy Initiatives
Office of the Mayor of the City of New York
before the
New York City Council Committee on Government Operations,
on
Monday, September 20 at 10:00am

Thank you to Chair Cabrera and the members of the Committee on Governmental Operations for calling this hearing. My name is Laura Wood, and I am the Chief Democracy Officer at DemocracyNYC. Thanks to you and your colleagues for holding this hearing today and for the opportunity to provide testimony, and thank you to the staff and advocates who helped work to make this happen.

Recognizing that voting is the key mechanism of democracy, DemocracyNYC and this administration have worked over the past few years to push for increased civic participation and to streamline voting processes. This work has recognized that the city is stronger when all its residents, regardless of country of birth, language spoken, or years here in the city, are engaged in the political process.

The June 2021 primary in New York City was nothing short of historic; with over 350 candidates on the ballot in competitive municipal elections across the city and the first ever citywide election with a new system of ranked choice voting, DemocracyNYC, along with key governmental partners at the Campaign Finance Board, Board of Elections, Civic Engagement Commission, Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs, the Young Men's Initiative and the Mayor's Public Engagement Unit, worked tirelessly to ensure voters were provided with information about ranked choice voting and the importance of the June primary in the neighborhoods they lived and in the languages they spoke. Furthermore, along with the Campaign Finance Board, DemocracyNYC has been hosting an informal elections consortium since March 2020 with over 50 civic engagement and advocacy organizations citywide to discuss and address issues related to NYC elections as they arise.

While there is always more work to be done -- especially in communities with lower registration and turnout rates -- we were pleased that voter participation was the highest we've seen in a mayoral primary in 30 years. More than 940,000 voters participated in the 2021 primaries, the highest since 1989.

With so much focus on local elections this year, we are gratified that the Council has called a hearing on this important topic. Noncitizen voting is part of New York City's history. Before the end of the school boards, all public-school parents and guardians, regardless of citizenship, were

able to vote in school board elections. If Intro. 1867 becomes law, New York City will be the first large city in the U.S. to allow noncitizens to vote in all municipal elections.

In my testimony today, I will discuss the importance of voting in local elections, the steps that DemocracyNYC has taken to increase access to voting, and the City's questions regarding Intro. 1867.

Local Elections

Local elections are where democracy meets day-to-day realities. Some of the most important issues facing New Yorkers today, including housing, education, and poverty, are issues that are deeply shaped by local policies. This is why DemocracyNYC has worked with the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs (MOIA), the NYC Civic Engagement Commission (CEC), and our other agency and non-governmental partners to ensure that New Yorkers, including immigrant New Yorkers, have a voice in the political process.

Since 2017, the City has worked to increase access to language interpretation services at poll sites across the City, in recognition that language should not be a barrier to the exercise of this most fundamental of democratic rights. This work began as a partnership between the City and Council and is meant to supplement the services that the New York City Board of Elections provides as required under the federal Voting Rights Act. Over the past few years, DemocracyNYC, MOIA, and the CEC have built on our learnings from the project and institutionalized this work within the CEC. Since November 2020, the CEC has provided poll site interpretation in line with their methodology initially published in April 2020 and further amended in January and June 2021.

Our work this past spring was bolstered by an unprecedented investment of \$15 million in voter education to inform New Yorkers on the new Ranked Choice Voting system ahead of the June primary. This included a citywide advertising campaign in 25 languages, investments in language access and accessibility resources, and direct outreach partnerships with community groups, faith-based organizations, Minority and Women-Owned Businesses (MWBs), and other stakeholders. Since December 2020, DemocracyNYC worked with over 155 partners, held over 50 workshops in over 5 languages, sent over 2.4 million text messages and made over 9,000 calls to inform New Yorkers about Ranked Choice Voting and their voting rights, sent over 1 million robocalls, mobilized nearly 400 volunteers to voter facing events including CUNY interns and engaged over 5,000 people at in-person events, all to ensure voters were ready to rank their vote and head to the polls to elect their next municipal leaders. DemocracyNYC's paid advertising campaign was on 542 bus shelters and newsstands in all five boroughs and in 2000 subway cars. In total, the QR Codes linking to our RankedVote mock interactive ballots on our out of home ads received 1,719 scans. Furthermore, OpAD, DemocracyNYC's media placement vendor estimated that DemocracyNYC reached over 90% of New Yorkers with ads in 25 different

languages. In total our ads delivered approximately 122,586,077 impressions, 339,590 clicks, and 19,993,856 video completions. In total, our RankedVote mock interactive ballots which we linked to on our digital ads and also organically circulated received 86,549 clicks.

Noncitizen Voting and Intro. 1867

Immigrants make up a crucial part of New York City. As the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs has noted in its annual report, New York City is home to about 3 million immigrants who comprise about 36 percent of the city's population. This includes hundreds of thousands of immigrants who would be eligible to vote under Intro. 1867.

Intro. 1867 aims to open municipal elections to these New Yorkers. While we understand and appreciate the goals of this bill, we have questions and some concerns about the way this bill is structured. Ultimately, it is these questions that mean that the City is not taking a position on the bill at this time.

Specifically, Intro. 1867 as written raises substantial legal questions that require careful review. For example, we note that Article II, §1 of the New York State Constitution provides that "citizens" have the right to vote in New York State. This provision's terms apply to our local offices through Article IX of the New York State Constitution which requires local elective officers to be elected by "persons entitled to vote as provided in section one of article two" of the Constitution. We believe that review of these issues with the City's lawyers and Council legal staff is appropriate to ensure a shared understanding of the legal context.

In addition, and as the Mayor and my office have said publicly, the Board of Elections is in urgent need of reform. Allocating responsibility for noncitizen voting to an institution that is unreliable and unaccountable raises serious concerns, especially as it relates to privacy, discrimination, and legal consequences. Noncitizens who vote in federal elections, even inadvertently, can face severe criminal and immigration consequences. We do not feel confident that the BOE would be able to minimize the risk of error in this context.

While the City does not take a position on Intro. 1867 at this time, we believe that noncitizen voting is an issue that must continue to be explored. This is an issue that has been raised publicly before the Racial Justice Commission, and conversations are continuing citywide.

We look forward to discussing the bill further with the City Council.

Conclusion

Thank you again to Chair Cabrera and the members of the Committee on Governmental Operations for calling this hearing. I look forward to answering any questions you have on this important topic.



**TESTIMONY OF THE MAYOR'S OFFICE OF CITY LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS
BEFORE THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL
COMMITTEES ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS**

Monday September 20, 2021

Good morning, Chair Cabrera and members of the Committee. I am Paul Ochoa, Director of the Mayor's Office of City Legislative Affairs. I'm here to discuss Intro. 2316 by Council Member Salamanca.

As you know, one of the roles of the office of City Legislative Affairs is to ensure that the Administration is prepared to testify at all relevant Council hearings. We take this responsibility incredibly seriously, and we pride ourselves in having a great relationship with all the Chairs of the 30+ committees at the City Council.

Every time there is a committee hearing, either in person, or virtual, we always have people watching and taking notes in order for the Administration to follow up with the relevant Chairs if there's an issue raised that merits a formal response.

In fact, if there is a special request, as there was today letting members of the public testify first, we coordinate with Chairs and Committee staff, in order to accommodate these special circumstances.

Intro. 2316 would mandate by law that an officer or employee of the City agency must be in attendance for the entirety of the hearing to listen to all the questions and testimony presented at the hearing. While we of course support the idea of having members of the Administration stay for the whole hearing, as we always do, legislating this would set a difficult precedent to meet without much impact to the public. As I mentioned at the beginning of the testimony, we are always happy to coordinate with the relevant Chairs in order to ensure that the Council and the Public both feel like they are being listened to by Administration officials at the Council hearings.



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Testimony of Eric Friedman
Assistant Executive Director for Public Affairs
New York City Campaign Finance Board

New York City Council Committee on Governmental Operations
09/20/2021

Thank you members of the New York City Council Committee on Governmental Operations for the opportunity to testify on Int. No. 1867 which would allow certain city residents to vote in municipal elections, and Int. No. 2316 which would require a representative of City agencies to be in attendance for the entirety of a hearing where they are required to testify. I am Eric Friedman, Assistant Executive Director for Public Affairs at the New York City Campaign Finance Board (CFB). With me today is Amanda Melillo, Deputy Director for Public Affairs.

As you know, the CFB is mandated by the New York City Charter to encourage and facilitate voter registration and voting by all eligible residents of New York City, but particularly among underrepresented populations. The CFB is often called before the City Council to testify on relevant campaign finance and voting legislation. We are happy to offer input on both bills today.

Beginning with Councilmember Salamanca's bill, Int. No. 2316, we are supportive of measures to increase transparency and hold government officials accountable to the public they serve. It is already our agency practice to stay for the entirety of the committee meeting in case Council Members who were not present at the reading of oral testimony have any questions for a member of our staff. We believe it is incredibly important to speak to our work and provide information where it is needed so the Council can conduct their oversight role effectively and efficiently. Further, it is important to hear from advocates and others who provide useful information to the Council. We would strongly encourage that everyone who is part of the oversight process be present during an entire hearing.

We are also supportive of the principles underlying Councilmember Rodriguez’s bill, Int. No. 1867, which would allow lawful permanent residents and those holding work authorizations to vote in municipal elections. New York is and always will be a city of immigrants. Our door is always open—it is what makes our city great.

Every New Yorker who lives and works in our city contributes to the vitality of our communities. Every New Yorker who lives and works here should have a say in who represents them in government, and have a voice on the policy issues that impact their daily lives. Likewise, elected officials should be held accountable to represent all New Yorkers, regardless of their citizenship status. This bill would give a voice to more than 825,000 people who are already part of our city’s civic life.

We are prepared to do our part to enact this bill should it be passed. However, we do want to highlight several serious issues concerning potential unintended consequences of this legislation that could prove harmful if they are not addressed. The bill should not move through the legislative process before certain questions can be answered about the bill’s implementation. Additionally, we have several questions related to immigration law that are outside our scope of expertise but that we believe should also be further researched by the Council.

Our first concern is the privacy and safety of individuals with non-citizen immigration statuses. In an era where immigration policy is front and center, we want to ensure this legislation does not make it easier for any administration, at the local, state, or federal level, to endanger the rights of vulnerable New Yorkers. The voter file is public information and contains a person’s name and address, which could be used for individual or targeted harassment. We urge the Council to consider this possible consequence and take steps to ensure that the voter file is not used with malicious intent.

We are also concerned that a municipal voter could inadvertently commit a felony by voting a ballot that lists state or federal races. A simple poll worker error—giving a municipal voter the wrong ballot at a poll site—could put that voter at risk. Language contained within the State’s

Automatic Voter Registration law provides legal cover for persons inadvertently registered as voters, but we are not certain the same degree of protection can be applied in a situation where a voter actively votes a ballot, even if it is in error.

There are other questions outside of our expertise about the bill's interaction with immigration laws, such as: Could this bill impact a person's citizenship status or their ability to vote in their country of origin? To provide assurances to the intended beneficiaries of this legislation, the Council should consult experts in immigration law to ensure that all possible scenarios are addressed.

We also have questions related to how the bill would be implemented. How would the Board of Elections confirm a person's immigration status is valid, or be notified if that status is revoked or expired? Would an entirely separate set of ballot styles be required for municipal voters? We want to ensure the input of the Board of Elections is taken into consideration, since they are the body that administers elections and manages voter registration. We defer to the Board to discuss specific concerns related to implementation and how this bill would interact with existing state and federal election laws.

We raise these questions because the details of implementation will drive how we conduct the voter education component to support it. From a programmatic perspective, this legislation would have a significant impact on the Campaign Finance Board's Charter mandate to engage and register underrepresented voters. The scope of our outreach will necessarily increase with the prospect of adding nearly one million newly eligible voters to the voter rolls for municipal elections. To successfully reach this new population and inform them of their rights, an extensive ground game involving collaboration with community-based groups would need to be paired with an investment in an advertising campaign that would amplify the reach of these education efforts.

To achieve the anticipated scale, together we should look to the Census effort as a model for engaging the non-citizen population. Different strategies are needed than those we have traditionally used to reach currently registered voters. A successful campaign would need to rely

on qualitative research, where we would hear from non-citizens directly about potential barriers they face, concerns they have, and what would help them to overcome those concerns so they could register and vote. This research should drive an advertising campaign that encompasses traditional advertising through television, radio, newspapers, and digital, but with a greater investment in community and ethnic media to get the word out. This should complement efforts across the city to engage people in their communities, using tools such as presentations and direct person-to-person contact.

We would also need to consider how to design the voter experience to minimize confusion. This bill would create a new type of voter that would register with a different voter registration form. We would need to retool our online resources to create a way to ensure voters are served the right information, without running the risk that a municipal-only voter would use a state registration form meant for citizens, or vice versa. In addition to helping voters locate the correct registration option, we would also need to deliver different types of information to each kind of voter. For example, we would need to serve customized information to a municipal-only voter audience, on the website and in the online Voter Guide, and email or text message election alerts. We would also want to explore providing more in-depth translation of information that we put on our social media platforms.

In addition to the Voter Guide information on our website, we mail a print Voter Guide to every registered voter in advance of municipal elections. Our Voter Guide is printed in several editions, targeted to each voter's specific district. It is our goal to give every voter the information they need to cast an informed ballot on Election Day. Mailing print Voter Guides to more voters comes with an additional printing and postage cost that depends on how many new municipal voters register. To reduce confusion for municipal voters around which offices they are qualified to vote in, we anticipate the need to create voting instructions specific to municipal voters. We could provide a separate mailing for those voters, or create an entirely new set of printed voter guides that cater specifically to this population.

We are also the agency mandated to provide education and outreach on ranked choice voting, which will be used in the rapidly approaching 2023 City Council elections. In 2021, we

accomplished our education mandate through coordination with citywide nonprofits, neighborhood and community groups, and other government agencies. We heard from these groups that our materials would be able to reach more New Yorkers if they were translated into more languages, which we did not have the capacity to accommodate.

To meet the needs of more New Yorkers, we suggest that the legislation include additional language access requirements. The CFB currently translates our website and voting materials into the four federal Voting Rights Act languages: Spanish, Chinese, Korean, and Bengali. In our experience working with communities of naturalized citizens, many voters prefer to receive election materials in the language they feel most comfortable speaking in, which may not be English. This means the diversity of languages spoken by New Yorkers should be represented in elections communications and should include written translations and in-person interpreters. By expanding language translations of our voting materials, we can also more effectively reach newly naturalized citizens who are also a historically underrepresented group. Translating the Voter Guide, website, and social media accounts to additional languages will come at an additional cost, but we believe it will be more than worthwhile to provide better service to voters.

Lastly, we would also suggest that the Council consider making the implementation date effective January 1, 2023. A policy measure with so much at stake requires adequate time to implement and ample time to educate newly registered voters. This would also coincide with the 2023 City Council redistricting elections.

New York would be the largest jurisdiction by far to expand the franchise for local elections to lawful permanent residents. Per our responsibilities to inform New Yorkers about their elections, we hope to remain engaged with the Council as this bill goes through the legislative process. Specifically, as part of our Charter-mandated Voter Analysis Report, we hope to include information in next year's report should Int. No. 1867 be signed into law.

Through our matching funds program, and our NYC Votes initiative, the CFB is dedicated to ensuring all New Yorkers have a say in our democracy.

We thank the Council for considering the issues we have raised here today and for the opportunity to testify. We are happy to answer any questions you might have.

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**TESTIMONY OF STATE SENATOR BRAD HOYLMAN BEFORE THE NEW YORK
CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENTAL OPERATIONS
REGARDING INTRODUCTION 1867,
MUNICIPAL VOTING RIGHTS**

SEPTEMBER 20, 2021

Good morning, Chair Cabrera and members of the committee. I am Senator Brad Hoylman representing State Senate District 27 in Manhattan and chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of Introduction 1867, to expand voting rights in New York City elections to nearly one million noncitizen New Yorkers.

Throughout our nation, we are witnessing a mass-scale, coordinated attack on voting rights. In fact, over the last few years, more than 400 anti-voter bills have been introduced in 48 states.¹ This deluge of legislation has made it harder for millions of Americans to have their voice heard. Here in New York, we can chart a different course. We can set an example for the rest of the nation and make clear that in a democracy, voting should be accessible. Let's expand the electorate and bring more people into our democracy.

New York has always been a city of immigrants. We owe our legacy of success and growth in large part to the many who left their homes and moved here in search of a better life. History has shown us that when immigrants thrive, our entire city thrives. 2020 reinforced this point, when thousands of immigrants served as essential workers at the height of the pandemic and ensured that our city would survive one of our darkest moments. In fact, over half of essential workers are foreign born. As we work our way out of this pandemic, it is important to acknowledge that not only did our immigrant neighbors serve our city bravely, but they also faced the brunt of the health and economic displacement caused by the pandemic.

Clearly these New Yorkers are already a part of our community, they are our neighbors, and yet they do not have a say in our local elections. These New Yorkers have played a

¹ <https://www.aclu.org/news/civil-liberties/block-the-vote-voter-suppression-in-2020/>

central role in our city's recovery, yet they are largely cut out of civic life and the everyday decisions that shape our communities. We should expand democracy and the electorate by allowing foreign born New Yorkers the right to vote in municipal elections.

New York has led the way before and we can lead again. Expanding the franchise is of crucial importance. This is why I carry S.366 in the State Senate, to allow New Yorkers 16 and older the ability to vote. I am also proud to have supported recent voting rights reforms at the state level, like early voting and expanded mail in voting, to boost turnout and ensure that everyone has the ability to vote on their terms.

While over the course of our Nation's history we have pushed to expand our democracy and create a more fair and inclusive society, today there are anti-democratic forces turning back the clock. It is up to us to preserve that legacy and continue fighting for a more perfect union.

I urge the council to pass this legislation and set an example for the nation.



Donovan Richards Jr.

QUEENS BOROUGH PRESIDENT

Good morning, everyone. My name is Donovan Richards and I have the honor of serving as Queens Borough President. Thank you to the Committee on Governmental Operations for allowing me the opportunity to provide testimony on such a critical topic.

I don't believe anyone needs to be lectured on the right to vote. But if we look across the country, we see state after state propose and impose draconian, overtly racist restrictions on who can vote, how to vote and even if you're allowed to distribute water to people waiting to vote.

We watched in horror last year as the sitting U.S. president shamelessly cast doubt on the legitimacy of an election, while imploring officials to throw out legally cast ballots or otherwise disenfranchise millions of people from exercising their most basic fundamental right as Americans.

What we're seeing across the country should shock us. But it should also serve as a call to action right here in New York City — not just to protect the right to vote, but to expand it. And I wholeheartedly believe enacting Intro 1867 into law is a critical and necessary step toward doing just that.

This vital piece of legislation itself will serve as a pathway toward democracy by opening the political process to nearly one million noncitizen New Yorkers — giving them an equal say in the future of a city many of them have called home for years.

They are our frontline essential workers — healthcare heroes, grocery store workers, teachers, food service workers — who sacrificed so much for our city during its time of need

They are our loved ones, our friends, neighbors and colleagues.

Like all of us in this room, they are New Yorkers — active citizens who pay their taxes, start small businesses, create jobs and uplift their communities.

But when June's mayoral primary rolled around, they were needlessly prevented from making their voice heard as to who should represent them

How can we just sit here and ask so much of them, only to deny them that basic right to vote? If we are serious about protecting, expanding the right to vote in this city and finally addressing

this long-standing, modern form of taxation without representation, we must immediately pass Intro. 1867.

Our city in recent years has also made significant strides in recent years to increase community participation in our political process.

We've done that through enacting participatory budgeting, allowing all residents, regardless of immigration status, to vote on projects they want to see funded right in their neighborhoods.

We've done that through Ranked Choice Voting just a few months ago.

Allowing our lawful permanent residents and our DACA, TPS and special Visa recipients to vote in municipal elections will certainly represent a significant boost in voter turnout — something all of us in this room have sought, while also painting a more accurate picture of how a community views its candidates and its future.

We've seen similar laws enacted cities across Maryland and Massachusetts. And in the absence of both federal legislation creating a pathway to citizenship and efforts to address a growing backlog of citizenship applications, there is no reason why New York — one of the most diverse places on the planet — has not yet taken the lead on such a critical issue.

Nearly three dozen Council members have signed onto Intro. 1867, including 8 members who represent at least parts of Queens, and I thank them for their leadership.

Now I ask the full City Council to do its part to make our political process more inclusive and our city a fairer place to live. In a time when our vulnerable communities and democracy itself are under threat, passing Intro 1867 the least we can do to protect them.

Thank you for your time.



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www.CIDNY.org

Center for Independence of the Disabled, NY

September 17, 2021

Hearing: In relation to allowing lawful permanent residents in New York City to vote in municipal elections (Intro 1867-2020)

The New York City Council Committee on Governmental Operations

Monica Bartley
Community Outreach Organizer

**MEMORANDUM IN SUPPORT
INTRO 1867-2020**

The Center for Independence of the Disabled, NY (CIDNY) is a leading advocate for New Yorkers of all ages and with all types of disabilities. We serve all New Yorkers regardless of their immigration status. CIDNY's goal is to ensure full integration, independence, and equal opportunity for all people with disabilities by removing barriers to the social, economic, cultural, and civic life of the community. Part of CIDNY's mission is to ensure the full participation of individuals with disabilities in the electoral process. And to encourage those who are eligible to do so.

New York City has always been a City of immigrants who come here seeking a better life. Immigrants have the right to contribute to bettering our City through participation in voting and elections. People with disabilities must be included in this process so that they can help to determine the necessary accommodations required for involvement at all levels of civic life.

Our City will be improved when all New York City residents that have committed to living here can participate in shaping it by helping to choose its elected leaders.

The passing of Intro 1867-2020 will allow all permanent residents with disabilities to contribute to the civic affairs of NYC so that they can represent themselves on issues that affect them.

CIDNY supports the Intro. 1867-2020 (Rodriguez), concerning allowing lawful permanent residents in New York City to vote in municipal elections. CIDNY seeks that the New York City Council sign this bill into law.





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**New York City Council Committee on Governmental Operations
Council Member Fernando Cabrera, Chair
Introduction 1867 - Municipal Voting Rights**

**Testimony of Nora Moran, United Neighborhood Houses
September 20, 2021**

Introduction

Thank you for convening today's hearing and for the opportunity to testify in support of Introduction 1867 to expand voting rights in New York City elections. My name is Nora Moran, Director of Policy and Advocacy at United Neighborhood Houses (UNH). UNH is a policy and social change organization representing 44 neighborhood settlement houses, including 40 in New York City, that reach over 765,000 New Yorkers from all walks of life. A progressive leader for more than 100 years, UNH is stewarding a new era for New York's settlement house movement. We mobilize our members and their communities to advocate for good public policies and promote strong organizations and practices that keep neighborhoods resilient and thriving for all New Yorkers.

For too long we've seen a fundamental disconnect between public policies and our communities. It's time for New York City to hear from more of its residents and modernize civic participation. **UNH urges the City Council to pass Intro 1867 immediately.**

This legislation would amend the City Charter to permit lawfully present residents and those with work authorizations to vote in municipal elections, including races for Mayor, Comptroller, Public Advocate, Borough President, and City Council, as well as referenda and other local contests. The legislation would also allow noncitizen residents to join political parties, and vote in primary elections for municipal offices. Under its terms, a noncitizen would be qualified to vote in municipal elections if she or he is (1) a lawfully permanent resident or authorized to work in the United States (including Green Card holders and work authorizations such as DACA and TPS status); (2) a resident of New York City for at least 30 days; and (3) otherwise qualified to register to vote under New York State election law once exempted from the requirement that she or he possess United States citizenship.

Background

For over a century settlement houses have driven higher levels of civic engagement, particularly among disenfranchised community members. UNH works closely with settlement houses to promote civic engagement across New York City through leading nonpartisan voter mobilization, promoting the inclusion of all residents in the 2020 Census and the redistricting process, and

advocating for modernized election laws to ensure residents who live and work in the city are fairly represented in local government.

New York City is home to more than 3 million immigrants who contribute billions of dollars to our economy and expand the cultural and social vitality of our city. Even in normal times, New York City could not function without these immigrants. During the COVID-19 crisis, we saw the vital contributions immigrants made on behalf of our city. Over half of New York City's frontline workers during the pandemic were immigrants, and 1 in 5 were noncitizens.¹ These New Yorkers have been risking their lives to treat those stricken with COVID-19, stock our grocery shelves, take care of our elderly, and keep this city running in a time of crisis.

Despite their contributions and sacrifices, these New Yorkers cannot vote in local elections and have no say on the issues that affect them most, including public education, street safety, housing affordability, and more. And despite contributing billions of dollars in taxes annually, just like everyone else, these New Yorkers have no say in how their taxes are spent. These are our coworkers, neighbors, and friends.

Our nation's founders rallied behind the idea of "no taxation without representation." Those same founders chose not to make citizenship a requirement for voting. Race, gender, and property ownership were among the restrictions the founders imposed, but not citizenship. That is why noncitizen voting was common for the first 150 years of US history. Slowly, as our nation's immigration policies changed, the right to vote was stripped from noncitizens. In New York City, noncitizens were still permitted to vote in local school board elections until 2002, when school boards were eliminated in favor of Mayoral control of schools.

The right to vote has historically been linked to ideas about who we feel should or should not have political power. Allowing 900,000 New Yorkers with legal status the ability to vote in our local elections is a step towards acknowledging and expanding representation in our city; it sends a powerful message that New York does not support the national movement to restrict voting access; and it will build a better city for every New Yorker.

Furthermore, there is nothing in the federal or state constitution that prohibits New York City from passing Intro 1867.

The Our City Our Vote coalition, of which UNH co-leads with the New York Immigration Coalition, is calling on New York City to restore municipal voting rights for 900,000 Legal Permanent Residents and individuals with work authorization.

National Context and Momentum

We are seeing states across the country take action to suppress voting rights, and here in New York City we have an opportunity to change the national discussion by expanding voting rights in

¹ <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/immigrants/downloads/pdf/MOIA-Annual-Report-for-2020.pdf>

municipal elections. As of today, the Our City, Our Vote coalition has over 65 partners, 28 endorsements, and 34 bill sponsors advocating for this legislation.

New York City would be the largest municipality in the nation to implement noncitizen voting in local elections, but it would not be the first. Takoma Park, Maryland implemented noncitizen voting for local elections in 1992, and they were soon followed by ten other Maryland municipalities. Implementation has been smooth and we have consulted with them to inform Intro 1867 bill language. San Francisco, California began allowing noncitizen voting in school board elections following a ballot initiative vote in 2016. Two municipalities in Vermont approved non-citizen municipal voting in June 2021. The movement is spreading, with new proposals now active in Chicago, Washington DC, and several municipalities in Massachusetts, among others.

Intro 2316

In addition, UNH supports Intro 2316 introduced by Council Member Salamanca, which would provide that in any case in which testimony is presented by a City agency at a City Council committee hearing, an officer or employee of the City agency must be in attendance for the entirety of the hearing to listen to all the questions and testimony presented at the hearing. The bill would only apply to a City Council committee hearing that is open to the general public. This bill is necessary to ensure City agencies are listening to the public's ideas and concerns at critical City Council hearings.

Conclusion

Expanding the right to vote in municipal elections to residents with legal status would provide more New Yorkers with the opportunity to have a say on issues that affect them and strengthen the voices of all our communities.

With citywide support and a super majority of City Council sponsors, now is the time to pass Intro 1867. The only thing standing in the way is a vote. We're proud to join our partners in calling on the Speaker of the City Council to move this bill forward and pass Intro 1867 immediately.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and for the Council's leadership on this critical issue. For more information, please contact me at nmoran@unhny.org.

Testimony of Adhikaar for Human Rights and Social Justice

Committee on Governmental Operations
Council Member Fernando Cabrera, Chair
Introduction 1867 - Municipal Voting Rights
September 17, 2021

Dear Chair Cabrera and members of the committee:

We submit this testimony on behalf of Adhikaar, an immigrant women-led organization based in Woodside, New York. Since 2005, we are the only social justice organization serving and mobilizing the Nepali-speaking community—an underserved, undercounted, and underfunded community. Through a holistic approach that flows from direct services to organizing and advocacy, we build community power and advance workers rights, language justice, immigration justice, and healthcare access. We are grateful for the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of Introduction 1867, to expand voting rights in New York City elections to nearly one million noncitizen New Yorkers.

We live in a democracy, and yet nearly one million of our fellow New Yorkers are denied the right to vote. This includes Nepali-speaking community members of New York City. Our community is one of the newer immigrant communities and according to a report by the Asian American Federation, the fastest growing Asian ethnic group. Our members keep our city running, employed as nail salon workers, domestic workers, taxi drivers, restaurant workers, and other informal sector workers. We largely live in Jackson Heights, Woodside, East Elmhurst, Elmhurst, Corona, Maspeth, Sunnyside, Ridgewood, Jamaica and Flatbush. Many of our members are women-identifying and are of mixed family status, on temporary visas or undocumented. They often face discrimination at the intersection of race, class, gender, caste, and immigration status.

While our members pay taxes and contribute significantly to the New York City economy, many of them are denied the right to vote in municipal elections. To change this, we joined as a member of the *Our City Our Vote* Coalition. At Adhikaar, we see civic engagement as essential to building inclusive systems and engage in a range of efforts to ensure our community is seen, heard, and able to actively participate in democratic processes. Our members regularly join our language-accessible citizenship preparation classes, Census and GOTV initiatives. We also develop the political knowledge of our members on issues that affect low-wage immigrants through language accessible educational tools and engagement in campaigns to fight for change and hold our electeds accountable. For example, we directly organize Nepali Temporary Protected Status (TPS) holders and are currently pushing for permanent residency for all TPS holders and DACA recipients. In 2020, we published the first-ever national survey of Nepali TPS holders in partnership with Center for American Progress and U.S Immigration Policy Center. The findings from the survey confirmed that Nepali TPS holders have deep ties to the U.S. and the community they've built here.

One of our member leaders, Aruna poignantly testified at a meeting with our House Representative, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez on the deep community ties that she and other Nepali TPS holders have built in New York and the urgent need for permanent residency:

"As TPS holders, we are fighting this global pandemic on one hand and on the other fighting to stay in this country. Although we are protected from being deported, with the lawsuit, the end to the TPS is so close. NY has become home because I have lived and worked with families here, I have made a community where I have built deep connections."

Aruna

During this ongoing pandemic, half of all frontline, essential workers are immigrants; and 1 in 5 are noncitizen New Yorkers. Aruna, like many Nepalis in New York City are essential workers—working in grocery stores, gas stations, restaurants, and as domestic workers, package delivery workers and drivers for ride-share companies. They have kept the country running through the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. As they continue to risk their lives for our country, we must ensure that they have a voice in shaping our City government. Expansion of municipal rights to noncitizen New Yorkers is central to achieving this goal.

As voter suppression laws rage across this country, we must stand up and fight back. By passing Introduction 1867, New York City will again lead the country and serve as a model of what's needed to achieve a true, participatory democracy.

33 council members have put their names on this bill. That is more than enough votes to pass. We urge the city council to do the right thing and pass this legislation immediately.

Thank you for your time and consideration.



**AMERICAN IMMIGRATION LAWYERS ASSOCIATION
NEW YORK CHAPTER
2021-2022**

Executive Committee

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September 20, 2021

The New York City Council

250 Broadway

New York, NY 10007

**Re: Committee on Governmental Operations Hearing
on INT. 1867-2020.**

Dear New York City Council Members.

Past Chapter Chairs

Sylvia Livits-Ahyass

Rachel Baskin

Jennifer Durkin

Neena Dutta

Amy Fallon

We are submitting this testimony on behalf of the New York Chapter of the American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA), the nation's largest professional organization of immigration lawyers. My name is Molly Sellner Harris and I am the co-chair of the committee on media & advocacy for the NY Chapter of AILA and I thank you for the opportunity to address the Committee on Governmental Operations regarding the proposed legislation, Intro. 1867-2020, a bill allowing lawful permanent residents in New York City to vote in municipal elections.

AILA has over 17,000 members nationwide, with more than 1,700 members in New York whose practices span the entire scope of immigration law. Founded in 1946, AILA is a nonpartisan, not-for-profit organization that provides continuing legal education, information, professional services, and expertise through its 39 chapters and over 50 national committees. AILA's mission is to promote justice, advocate for fair and reasonable immigration law and policy, advance the quality of immigration and nationality law and practice, and enhance the professional development of its members.

Because of our knowledge, experience and expertise in immigration law – including dealing with adjudications of naturalization applications by the United States Citizenship and Immigration

Services (“CIS”), we wanted to share our thoughts on this proposed legislation.

As of June of this year, there are twelve other municipalities in the United States that permit noncitizens to vote in local elections, though by far the largest of them, San Francisco, is allowing it only in its school board elections starting in November 2022.

Council Member Ydanis Rodriguez, when he introduced the bill back in January 2020, spoke passionately about his own journey as a long time lawful permanent resident, paying his taxes and helping out on many local political campaigns, including Mayor David Dinkins, who passed away this past November at age 93.

That same day Council Member Carlos Menchaca also spoke in support of this bill, stating, “This is gonna be a complicated conversation to restore those rights and to allow for our city to embed that voice into our municipal elections. And this is a game-changer for us. We've seen so much of that already in participatory budgeting. All or a majority of those have been cast in non-English ballots.”¹

Yes, it is a complicated conversation. We wholeheartedly agree that the enfranchisement of legal immigrants on local matters gives them an inclusive voice in their communities on issues that most affect their day to day lives. It provides a more equitable representation of those who live in NYC. But at the same time, we have serious concerns that the actual practice of noncitizens voting locally could lead to their denial of the ability to naturalize and potentially make them vulnerable to removal from the United States.

The current application to apply for naturalization before CIS, of the US Department of Homeland Security, is Form N-400. Let me read from the form:

Part 12, page 11, questions 1-3:

Part 12. Additional Information About You (Person Applying for Naturalization)

Answer **Item Numbers 1. - 21.** If you answer "Yes" to any of these questions, include a typed or printed explanation on additional sheets of paper.

- 1. Have you EVER claimed to be a U.S. citizen (in writing or any other way)?**
- 2. Have you EVER registered to vote in any Federal, state, or local election in the United States?**

¹ NYC Council, Stated Meeting Trans. 01/2020

3. Have you EVER voted in any Federal, state, or local election in the United States?²

Answering yes to any of these questions can have far reaching consequences.

Section 237(a)(6)(A) of the Immigration & Nationality Act, 8 USC 1227 states:

Any alien who has voted in violation of any Federal, State, or local constitutional provision, statute, ordinance, or regulation is deportable.

The Board of Immigration Affairs, in *Matter of Fitzpatrick*, 26 I&N Dec. 559 (BIA 2015), held that INA 237(a)(6) was an offense of “general,” not “specific” intent, which means that even if a noncitizen voted by mistake, without intent, they are still removable.

This very scenario of being subject to removal and banishment from the United States for inadvertently voting in a federal election was the subject of Waterwell Theatre’s 2019 presentation of *The Courtroom*, which reenacted a removal proceeding verbatim from court transcripts. The immigrant was a woman from the Philippines who married a US citizen, became a lawful permanent resident, and mistakenly registered to vote while getting her driver’s license at DMV. She received her voter card in the mail and subsequently voted, which set in motion her removal proceedings that she appealed all the way to the 7th Circuit Court of Appeals.³ Though she ultimately was allowed to remain in the United States, it was not without excellent legal representation, an ability to pay for that representation, and a receptive judicial forum.

The challenge before this council and subsequently for the NYC Board of Elections, other administrative agencies and the grassroots organizations supporting this legislation, is twofold. First, will the NYC budget continuously provide enough funding for training and education for both the general public and the election workers. Secondly, will comprehensive regulatory oversight be implemented which includes effective monitoring of polling locations and visual guidance to voters. And this must occur for all elections, most importantly federal elections – like a primary to fill a Congressional seat – to prevent noncitizens from mistakenly voting in them. Lastly this rollout MUST include a plan to regularly inform and train CIS and their adjudicators regarding an applicant who answers in the affirmative to question 2 & 3 above. This includes an update to the CIS adjudicators practice manual and discussed at the highest levels. And my over 20 years of experience as an immigration

² <https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/forms/n-400.pdf>

³ <http://waterwell.org/production/courtroom/>

attorney will tell you that CIS will need constant training and monitoring.

We want to state that our testimony is not an effort to marginalize the voices of non-citizens but a request (based on current CIS practice) to protect the ability of non-citizens to become US citizens in the future.

Thank you.

Molly Harris
AILA, NY Chapter

My name is Ali Rashid, and I am the president of American Pakistani Advocacy Group (APAG). American Pakistani Advocacy Group (APAG) is an advocacy and social welfare organization that aims to serve the south-Asian and Muslim community residing in New York City with a focus on Pakistani's immigrant population.

I am here today to advocate for Our City Our Vote legislation that would amend the City Charter to permit lawfully present residents (Green Card Holders) and those with work authorizations to vote in municipal elections. Approximately 23 percent of the residents of New York City are foreign-born. New York City is one of the most ethnically diverse cities in the United States and the most linguistically diverse place on Earth. America was built by Immigrants and New York City is the city of the immigrants and democracy should be inclusive and reflective of the people who call it home. That's a fundamental principle our democracy was founded on.

These immigrants who contribute billions of dollars to our economy and contribute to the cultural and social vitality of our city. Despite their contributions, many immigrants cannot vote in local elections and have no say on the issues that affect them most. This bill will make almost one million New Yorkers right to vote. They legally live here, work here, go to school here, and are raising families here. Yet, despite paying billions of dollars in taxes, they have no say in the direction of our city. The Our City, Our Vote bill presents an opportunity to right that wrong to create a more inclusive 21st century democracy that works for every New Yorker.

Everyone who pays taxes should be able to vote. No taxation without representation' is a principal our country was founded on. It is a basic civil right.

New Yorkers made a big difference in last week's election. Now, we have the opportunity to make another big change here in our City. We can become the largest municipality that reinstates the right of immigrant.

They are our essential workers and have no say in how programs and services and public policy impact them

It's a question of moral courage. It's time to do what's just and right. Freedom must not be for some it must be for all

This bill is about making democracy better so American Pakistani Advocacy Group fully support this bill

I personally reside in council district 23 that is represented by Council Member Barry Gordenchcik and very hopeful that when this bill comes to vote he supports this legislation.

Passing this law would be a game changer for immigrant communities across NYC. It's time for the NYC Council to pass Intro 1867. Let's get it done



**The Arab American
Association of
New York**

**Testimony of the Arab American Association of New York to the New York State
Independent Redistricting Commission**

Members of the Committee, Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today on behalf of Intro 1867 to expand voting rights in New York City. My Name is Sara El Sebai, and I am an Immigration Navigator with the Arab American Association of New York in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn.

The work our organization does in our community to promote democracy and voter engagement is unique. We serve immigrants from all over the Arab world who, before coming to the United States, lived in places where the freedom to vote and to choose their own elected officials was something they simply had never experienced. It is an incredibly rewarding part of the work we do to introduce these people to democracy and to help them join in on participating in their government in a way they never have been able to before.

Even among those who have citizenship, a dishearteningly high proportion of our population remains skeptical of the electoral system in New York. Many of the immigrants we serve are coming from places where elections, if they are held at all, are often little more than shams to enable those in power. On top of this, there is a distrust held by many in the Arab American community towards the federal, state, and city governments as a result of discriminatory surveillance and policing practices our community has experienced over the last 20 years. The result of this is that our community has a shockingly low rate of Democratic participation and engagement.

Today you've already heard from countless organizations talking about how Our City Our vote would empower countless immigrants from all over the world to participate in their government,



**The Arab American
Association of
New York**

and make New York one of the most Democratic cities in the country. But one of the most impactful things this law would do would be to create buy-in not just in the city government but in all levels of electoral government among immigrants who may not otherwise be inclined to do so. Building trust in America's democratic institutions is more important now than ever, and by taking a sledgehammer to the walls which separate immigrants from their municipal government, will be doing exactly that.

With one city council vote and a stroke of the pen from Mayor de Blasio, we can empower a new generation of Arab Americans, Muslim Americans, and immigrants from all over the world to fully become a part of the governance of the city they call home. We can take a stand against the disturbing anti-democratic trends we're seeing in states and cities across the country. And we can build trust between long excluded communities and the city governments they have long felt separated and divided from. We urge the city council to pass our city our vote into law, and empower New York's democracy for the 21st century.

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Testimony by the Arab-American Family Support Center

Committee on Governmental Operations
Council Member Fernando Cabrera, Chair
Introduction 1867 - Municipal Voting Rights
August 20, 2021

Good afternoon, Chair Cabrera and members of the committee. I want to begin by thanking the Committee on Governmental Operations and the New York City Council for inviting community-based organizations to testify on behalf of Introduction 1867, to expand voting rights in New York City elections to nearly one million noncitizen New Yorkers. My name is Farah Salam, and I am the Priority Areas Specialist for the Arab-American Family Support Center. I am honored to testify alongside the Our City, Our Vote Coalition on behalf of immigrants and refugees throughout New York City.

At the Arab-American Family Support Center (AAFSC), we have dedicated ourselves to creating an inclusive, safe haven for immigrants and refugees since 1994. We promote well-being, prevent violence, and prepare families to learn, work, and succeed. Our organization serves all who are in need, but with over 27 years of experience, we have gained cultural and linguistic competency serving New York's growing AMEMSA (Arab, Middle Eastern, Muslim, and South Asian) communities. Our staff speak 27 languages – including Arabic, Bangla, Russian, Spanish, and Urdu – enabling us to serve populations that mainstream providers struggle to reach.

Our communities have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic, suffering from the lack of linguistically accessible resources and information needed to keep them safe. Our communities experienced food and housing insecurity, inaccessibility to comprehensive healthcare, and severe mental duress. While immigrant and refugee populations were disproportionately employed in essential, front-line roles, many of our community members experienced barriers to receiving essential aid, such as financial assistance, COVID-19 testing, and PPE materials during the height of the pandemic. Meanwhile, working conditions, overcrowding, and overextended healthcare services left families especially vulnerable to COVID-19 infection and fatalities.

As a community-based organization providing vital services during the COVID-19 pandemic, AAFSC has focused on empowering and uplifting the voices of those who are systematically marginalized. Our agency has provided PPE to community members on the frontlines, distributed COVID-19 Resource Guides in Arabic, Bangla, Spanish, and Urdu translations, and ensured that community members could get access to resources despite their immigration status. To address lags in government funding, AAFSC has distributed over \$440,000 impacting over 2,300 community members, covering the cost of food, rent, utilities, and childcare materials, and reaching many individuals in need who would otherwise be ineligible for federal financial support.

Despite the essential roles that our community members have played throughout the city's history and, more visibly during the pandemic, they cannot vote. They are excluded from the opportunities that would allow them to contribute to civic society, and to decide who represents them in the city council. Voting in municipal elections will promote a sense of

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civic duty, harness the vital contributions of immigrant New Yorkers into tangible political power, and ensure that all community members can participate in decisions that impact their everyday lives.

During this ongoing pandemic, half of all front-line, essential workers are immigrants. In fact, 1 in 5 of these individuals are noncitizen New Yorkers. We asked them to risk their lives serving as medical professionals, keeping pharmacies and grocery stores open, and ensuring our buildings and transit systems remain clean. We cannot expect our neighbors to continue putting their lives at risk, even as they are excluded from the very system that holds those in power accountable.

We live in a democracy, and yet nearly one million of our fellow New Yorkers are denied the right to vote. These individuals are our coworkers, neighbors, and friends. Many have lived in this city for most of their lives. These New Yorkers have been contributing to our city by paying taxes and founding almost half of all the small businesses in our city. Many immigrant New Yorkers are active in their communities, yet back in June, one million of them were unable to choose the elected officials who will make decisions that affect their everyday lives.

In light of these observations, AAFSC joins the Our City, Our Vote Coalition in respectfully requesting the City to:

- Expand voting rights and be a model for the rest of the country; while other states and municipalities suppress voting rights for many living in vulnerable and low-income areas, we must advocate against voter suppression and disenfranchisement. New York City must lead the country and say that people who live here, who make New York City what it is, should be able to choose their elected leadership.
- Support the 33 council members who have signed on to support this policy; by expanding voting rights for all New Yorkers, we ensure that there is appropriate representation for the immigrants and refugees living in New York City, and that there is an opportunity for the millions of New Yorkers who have contributed to the growth and safety of our city before and during the pandemic.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify. As always, the Arab-American Family Support Center stands ready to work with you in ensuring that all New Yorkers have access to the services and support they need to lead healthy, safe, and fulfilling lives.



ASIAN AMERICAN LEGAL DEFENSE AND EDUCATION FUND
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**STATEMENT OF JUDY LEI
VOTING RIGHTS ORGANIZER, DEMOCRACY PROGRAM**

ASIAN AMERICAN LEGAL DEFENSE AND EDUCATION FUND
TO THE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENTAL OPERATIONS
COUNCIL MEMBER FERNANDO CABRERA, CHAIR
INTRODUCTION 1867 – MUNICIPAL VOTING RIGHTS

**Public Virtual Hearing, September 20, 2021
New York, New York**

Good morning Councilman Levin and members of the committee. I am Judy Lei, the Voting Rights Organizer at the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund's (AALDEF's) Democracy Team. AALDEF is a 47 year old New York based national civil rights organization that protects and promotes the civil rights of Asian Americans. Through litigation, advocacy, education and organizing, AALDEF works with Asian American communities across the country to secure human rights for all. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of Intro 1867, an initiative to expand voting rights in New York City.

As the Voting Rights Organizer of AALDEF, I organize alongside attorneys and community organizations across 14 states and Washington D.C. on the nation's largest Asian American exit poll. I also register newly sworn citizens to vote every Friday at the New York Southern District Courthouse, in which people explain to me that they have waited years, sometimes more than a decade, just to have a chance to participate in our country's democracy. I am constantly blown away by their enthusiasm for voting.

However, I am here today to speak for the working class, Chinese immigrant women like my mother's colleagues at the Chinatown bakery, who have been in this city for more than two decades, who are greencard holders, and who have contributed their tax dollars and labor to this city, but cannot vote for their City Council members and Mayor.

Non-citizen municipal voting is nothing new and has been implemented successfully in several jurisdictions. In San Francisco, they passed a charter amendment allowing non-citizen parents or guardians to vote in School Board Elections. In Maryland, nine municipalities have had the authority to grant non-citizens voting power in Barnesville, Chevy Chase (Section 3), Garrett Park, Glen Echo, Hyattsville, Martin's Additions, Riverdale Park, Somerset, and Takoma Park, where Takoma Park has had non-citizens voting for city council and mayor since 1992. In Vermont, as recently as June 2021, Montpelier and Winooski allow non-citizens to vote in municipal elections. Now, it's New York's turn to make non-citizen municipal voting a reality.

From 1969 through 2003, New York allowed non-citizen residents to vote in school board elections without incident. This created the most diverse group of parents elected to have a say in their child's education. Although this initiative was done through state authority, the initiative we're proposing does not require the state's permission.

Since there is a precedent here with no issues, it's time for New York to allow green card holders and those who have work authorization to be incorporated into our vibrant New York City community and allow them to vote in municipal elections.



Council on American-Islamic Relations, New York
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**STATEMENT OF
ABDOULAYE CISSE
OUTREACH COORDINATOR
COUNCIL ON AMERICAN-ISLAMIC RELATIONS, NEW YORK, INC.
BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENTAL OPERATIONS
NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL
COUNCIL MEMBER FERNANDO CABRERA, CHAIR**

**FOR A HEARING CONCERNING
INTRO. 1867 - MUNICIPAL VOTING RIGHTS**

**PRESENTED
MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 20, 2021**

Good morning, Chair Cabrera and members of the committee. I am Abdoulaye Cisse, Outreach Coordinator for the New York Chapter of the Council on American Islamic Relations (“CAIR-NY”). CAIR-NY is a leading civil rights advocacy organization for the Muslim community here in New York City and across New York State. Today, I speak in support of Intro. 1867 to expand voting rights in New York City elections to nearly one million noncitizen New Yorkers.

We live in a democracy, and yet nearly one million of our fellow New Yorkers are denied the right to vote. These are our coworkers, neighbors, and friends. Many of them have lived in this city for a long time.

Noncitizen New Yorkers are contributing members of our city. They pay taxes and have started almost half of all the small businesses in our city. Many are active in their communities. And yet back in June, one million of them were unable to choose the elected officials who will make decisions that affect their lives every day. This is not right.

I immigrated from Guinea West Africa in 1995, at the age of 6. Since 1997, I have called the Highbridge section of the Bronx in district 16 my home. Although I grew up here and went through the New York City public school system, I am not a US citizen and have never had the opportunity to vote in an election. I am a lawful permanent resident, better known as a green card holder, and Intro. 1867 will give me my first opportunity to cast a ballot in an election.

I am a community organizer and an advocate for immigrants. My passion for helping marginalized communities is why I joined CAIR-NY. People who know me, know me as the passionate Black Muslim who has independently taught adult immigrants basic English.

Some of my former adult students used their new literacy skills to pass their civics test and have since become naturalized U.S. citizens. I have organized community events like a Malcolm X book club and a Jollof rice giveaway in hopes of creating deeper bonds between African immigrants and African-Americans. Through CAIR-NY’s civic engagement activities, I have hosted a half dozen workshops educating the community on Ranked Choice Voting, organized numerous voter registration drivers—including registering 8 new voters for National Muslim Voter Registration Day two weeks ago, and I have mobilized and encouraged countless people to go vote.

I cannot vote but I push my community to go to the ballot box because I understand its value. Voting is how your voice is heard; it is the voter deciding whom they believe is best to represent them.

I work extremely hard to support my wife and child, both US Citizens. Part of this hard work was the one year I spent with NYC Test & Trace as a contact tracer at the height of the pandemic mitigating the spread of Covid-19 and providing the much-needed support for those who were infected. I have been a New Yorker for over 26 years and have paid my fair share in taxes. I'm a college graduate. I attend city council and mayoral debates. I personally know a handful of the candidates who ran for office in June.

The fact that people like me are disenfranchised is wrong and you have an opportunity to right this injustice. By passing Intro. 1867, you will give people like me, a community organizer, a taxpayer, a college educated professional, to not only talk-the-talk of civic engagement, but to finally walk it. I am but a sample of the tens of thousands of Muslim immigrants in the city who do not have a voice because they are unable to go the ballot box to vote.

I thank you for giving me the opportunity to address this urgent issue. **CAIR-NY fully supports Intro. 1867 and asks that you pass municipal voting rights for immigrants without delay.** You have the opportunity to empower one million immigrant New Yorkers. Thank you.



ADVANCING OUR
COMMUNITY

**Chinese-American Planning Council
Testimony Before the Committee on Governmental Operations
Council Member Fernando Cabrera, Chair
Introduction 1867 - Municipal Voting Rights
September 20, 2021**

Good afternoon Chair Levin and members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on behalf of Introduction 1867. I am Caroline Scown, an Adult Literacy Instructor at the Chinese-American Planning Council (CPC). The mission of CPC is to promote the social and economic empowerment of Chinese American, immigrant, and low-income communities. CPC is also a member of the Our City Our Vote Coalition.

Intro 1867 would expand voting rights in New York City elections to nearly one million noncitizen New Yorkers, many of whom have been long-time community members and leaders and contribute to the strength of our city in countless ways. They have a right to decide who represents them in municipal offices like the City Council or Mayor as the decisions made on the City level directly impact them and their communities. The concept of non-citizen voting is not new and many municipalities across the country have successfully implemented it. In fact, until school boards were disbanded in 2002, NYC allowed noncitizens to vote in school board elections for over 40 years.

I work with many New Yorkers through our Adult Literacy program at CPC and I'd like to share what this legislation will mean to them and their families.

I recently finished teaching a class to prepare community members to take the citizenship exam. More than half of my students weren't yet eligible to apply for citizenship, but they were taking the class, many for the second or third time already, because they were so interested in learning about American history and government. When I talked with one of these students, Todd, about the ideas behind Intro 1867, he told me why Our City Our Vote is such a powerful proposal, saying: "Non-citizens are living and working in the city

just as anyone else. Their voices should be heard. Their rights and ideas should be considered by the government, too."

Our community members do more than talk about civic engagement, they are committed to action. This spring, two of my students met with city lawmakers to advocate for adult literacy funding. Neither of them are citizens, but they were so invested in supporting adult literacy programs for their community that they were moved to testify. Over the years of the adult literacy program, dozens of our students have joined us to protest, testify, and speak up for what they believe in. Even though these New Yorkers are not citizens, they want a say in how our city is run.

During this ongoing pandemic, half of all frontline, essential workers are immigrants; and 1 in 5 are noncitizen New Yorkers. These are our neighbors and colleagues who risked their lives over the last 18 months to keep our hospitals, groceries, and other essential services running. They deserve a voice in government and a way to hold that government accountable to them and their communities. We shouldn't be wary of letting more New Yorkers participate in our democracy and our city should continue to lead the fight to expand voting rights and be a model for the rest of the country.

Currently, Intro 1867 has 33 co-sponsors totalling more than enough votes to pass. Now is the time to empower our immigrant communities and uplift their voices. I urge the city council to do the right thing and pass this legislation immediately.



Testimony of Demos
Committee on Governmental Operations
Council Member Fernando Cabrera, Chair
Introduction 1867 - Municipal Voting Rights
September 20, 2021

Good morning Chair Cabrera and members of the committee. I'm grateful for the opportunity to testify on in support of Introduction 1867, to expand voting rights in New York City elections to nearly one million noncitizen New Yorkers. My name is Shruti Banerjee, and I am a Senior Policy Analyst at Demos, an action-oriented think tank that addresses the most pressing issues related to our democracy and economy through policy advocacy and litigation. I previously served as a Policy Analyst in the NYC Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs—and, on a personal note, I am the daughter of immigrants who taught me the importance of getting involved in local politics to ensure that my community has equal access to public services and to have a say in the policies that impact our daily lives.

For our democracy to be inclusive and truly equitable, everyone's voice must be heard. Unfortunately, our current democratic system denies nearly one million of our fellow New Yorkers the right to participate in local elections. This prevents them from having any power to determine the policies that will benefit their communities, including increased access to public education, public transportation, food security programs, and health care. Passing this bill and expanding voting rights to non-citizen New Yorkers for local elections would be a vital step towards building a more representative democracy.

Non-citizen New Yorkers are integral members of our society and have kept our city running during the ongoing pandemic. Nearly 1/3rd (31 percent) of essential workers in New York are foreign-born (including naturalized citizens and non-citizen workers) and there are an estimated 480,700 essential workers in New York that are non-citizens with work authorization.ⁱ These New Yorkers continue to risk their lives to keep us safe by doing everything from serving as health care workers to keeping our pharmacies and grocery stores open, yet they are systemically silenced and excluded from our democracy. Denying non-citizen New Yorkers the right to vote ultimately prevents these communities from getting the resources they need to thrive.

Non-citizen voting is not a new concept in the United States. Our founding fathers imposed various restrictions to voting based on race, gender, and property ownership with the blatant intention of preventing anyone other than property owning white men from gaining political power. However, the founding fathers did not impose a requirement that voters must be citizens, so, for the first 150 years of our modern U.S. democracy, non-citizen voting was common.

Voting rights for non-citizens were later rescinded as a xenophobic and racist response to

the wave of immigrants moving to America. These exclusions successfully accomplished the goal of preserving political power for rich white men, and the discriminatory impact of these exclusions continue today. Restoring voting rights to non-citizens is not a novel idea. Several jurisdictions have restored voting rights to non-citizens, including San Francisco; Portland, Maine; Washington, D.C., as well as 10 towns in Maryland and five towns in Massachusetts. Additionally, New York City residents of any citizenship status can currently vote in 32 council districts to choose budget projects to improve their neighborhoods through the Participatory Budgeting program in NYC. Expanding voting rights to non-citizen New Yorkers in local elections is a vital step towards building an inclusive city government, encouraging civic engagement and dismantling white supremacist policies that continue to disenfranchise Black, brown, and Indigenous voters.

Opponents to this bill have argued that non-citizen New Yorkers should naturalize if they want to vote, but the naturalization process is expensive and lengthy. The application filing fee alone is \$640, plus a mandatory \$85 biometric fee, which amounts to a total of \$725ⁱⁱ just to submit the naturalization application—and it can cost thousands of dollars if the individual needs legal assistance with their application. The application fee can make the naturalization process unaffordable to many New Yorkers, and the inability to pay for this costly application currently functions as a barrier to the ballot box. The argument that non-citizen New Yorkers should naturalize before they can vote is essentially supporting a \$725 poll tax for immigrants.

Additionally, naturalizing can take 6-8 years, but the backlog of applications coupled with cancelled in-person interviews and oath ceremonies due to the pandemic, have further exacerbated the long application processing times. According to USCIS data, between October 1 - December 31, 2020 there were over one million pending naturalization applications nationwide, and nearly 32k pending applications in the New York City regional office alone (1,020,351 pending applications nationwide and 31,996 applications at the NYC regional office)ⁱⁱⁱ. The most recent USCIS data from April 1- June 30, 2021 indicates a slight decrease in the backlog to 907,424 pending applications nationwide, and 25,259 pending applications at the NYC regional office.^{iv} These lengthy processing times have forced tens of thousands of New Yorkers to wait years before they can participate in important elections, and many New Yorkers have missed the opportunity to vote in historic elections because they were waiting for USCIS to process their application.

Every individual vote has the power to sway an election, and margins of victory in local elections are often tight. For example, the most recent New York City mayoral primary race for the democratic candidate was decided by a little over 7k votes.^v This means the number of pending naturalization applications in the NYC regional office was more than triple the margin of victory in the last democratic mayoral primary election. New York City cannot continue to silence non-citizen New Yorkers by forcing them to go through a lengthy and costly naturalization process before having the right to participate in our democracy.

Without the right to vote, these New Yorkers cannot choose local elected officials that will fight for the needs of their communities, and they have no real way to hold the powerful accountable. Continuing to disenfranchise non-citizen New Yorkers will further entrench white supremacy in our system and will prevent us from building a more representative democracy

where our constituents can vote for policies that increase access to affordable housing, healthcare, education, and food security.

We are excited that 33 council members have already voiced their support for this bill, and we urge the city council to do the right thing and pass this legislation.

ⁱ “US Foreign-Born Essential Workers by Status and State, and the Global Pandemic.” By Donald Kerwin, Mike Nicholson, Daniela Alulema, and Robert Warren. Center for Migration Studies, May 2020. <https://cmsny.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/US-Essential-Workers-Printable.pdf>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.uscis.gov/n-400>

ⁱⁱⁱ USCIS data- Form N-400, Application for Naturalization, by Category of Naturalization, Case Status, and USCIS Field Office Location (Fiscal Year 2021, 1st Quarter, Oct. 1-Dec. 31, 2020)

https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/reports/N400_performancedata_fy2021_qtr1.pdf

^{iv} USCIS data - Form N-400, Application for Naturalization, by Category of Naturalization, Case Status, and USCIS Field Office Location (Fiscal Year 2021, 3rd Quarter, Apr. 1-Jun. 30, 2021)

https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/data/N400_performancedata_fy2021_qtr3.pdf

^v : Democratic candidate Eric Adams defeated Kathryn Garcia by 7,197 votes. “Eric Adams has won the Democratic primary, making him the favorite to be New York City's next mayor.” Politico, Sept. 14, 2021

<https://www.politico.com/election-results/2021/new-york-city/mayor/>



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OUR CITY OUR VOTE HEARING 09/20/21

We are DSI International Inc, a community-based Organization located in Queens area of New York City.

We joined our voice with the voices of other Coalition group in Support of the exciting legislation that expands democracy in New Your City so that Green Card holders and those with work authorization will be allowed to vote in election for City-level offices

Our community have been disenfranchised from performing their civic responsibility in the area of housing, street safety, policy etc. They do not even have a say on issues that affect the education of their children.

As it stands today, we have close to a million green card holder and those with work authorization who pay their taxes regularly but have been denied the opportunity to vote at the municipal elections.

Some of these people are essential workers (nurses, doctors, caregivers, teachers, food vendor etc) who put their lives on the line during the pandemic to make sure that lives are saved. I am proud to be one of them. **We are an essential part of everyday life and an asset to the survival of the economy yet, we have been completely shut out of the political life of our city by not been able to be part of the decision that impact our daily lives.** We do not have a say in the decision that affect the future of our children, the cleanliness of our environment, our local democracy etc.

Passing of the 1867 bill will allow this close to one million souls to be able to exercise civic responsibility and elect candidate of their choice that will represent them and make their voice heard.



DSI International Inc.

Diligently Serving Immigrants

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I therefore plead that the government of our time look into this area critically and let **this individual out of the bag** by allowing them to perform their civic responsibility without discrimination, fear or intimidation.

Thank you

Gbenga Awonusi

Project Manager

DSI International Inc



TESTIMONY OF ABIGAIL SANTIAGO ALCANTARA

Introduction 1867- Municipal Voting Rights

September 22, 2021

As a student, worker, immigrant, and permanent resident in New York City, this bill means a lot to me. It gives me the opportunity to decide on the leaders who represent my city, those who represent me, and mine. Passing this law would mean that my family members, like my father and brother, also legal residents in this city, would have the opportunity to vote for our elected officials. This law not only represents a few people, but it represents a million legal immigrants in New York who more than just pay taxes, live here, and raise their families here. Therefore, we want to have a say in decisions that also affect us, such as the election of our public servants. In addition, we must take into account the benefits that the passage of this law would cause to minority communities that are often marginalized and misunderstood due to leaders who do not represent us and who also do not know the root of many of the issues that affect our communities. Giving participation, voice, and vote in municipal elections to nearly one million residents will provoke individuals to be more involved, responsible, and interested in making positive change in their communities.

If we call ourselves a multiracial city that welcomes everyone; it's time for us to practice that inclusion and allow our people to vote for their leaders. Similar to me and my family, a million

other legal residents deserve to be able to have an influence in the decisions that are made in the city where we live, in our home New York.

Abigail Santiago Alcantara

College student



Testimony of Karina Johanna Buele

Committee on Governmental Operations
Council Member Fernando Cabrera, Chair
Introduction 1867 - Municipal Voting Rights
9/21/2021

Good morning, Chair Cabrera and members of the committee. I am Karina Johanna Buele, Service Coordinator for the Early Intervention Program with Achieve Beyond, a DACA recipient for the past nice years. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of Introduction 1867, to expand voting rights in New York City elections to nearly one million noncitizen New Yorkers, including myself.

I'm a long-time democrat and believe strongly in the principals of democracy and stand by them with my heart, soul, and life. How can a country that was founded on democracy have nearly one million New Yorkers that are denied the right to vote, to have a say in and not be allowed to make important decisions? We are your coworkers, your neighbors, your family members, and your friends. I have lived in New York City since the age of nine, making it 25 years of ongoing contributions to the great city of New York, in which I have never gotten a say as to how, why, when, or who gets to decide on policies that have long affected me, also may have benefitted me, and/or impacted me. I'm not ungrateful, on the other hand, I thanked first God, then my mother, and then all the people that have fought for the rights of immigrants in order for us to continue to contribute to this city, but why rely on others? Why can it not be me who makes those decisions? Why can I not be provided the opportunity to make decision that can and will impact me and those that I love dearly when I too contribute enormously, not just paying taxes.

I'm a graduate of Baruch College, a CUNY college. I work for children with disabilities, that are under the care of the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. I have done volunteer work and activist work since the age of 15, initially at my local library (in which I started a reading program for mothers in Corona).

Also, at my local parish teaching religious educational courses to children from 3rd grade to 12th grade, some with IEP (Individualized Educational Programs). I have supported and continue to do so the movement for Autism Speaks. I have participated at my daughters' cultural activities and many fund raisers at their schools. In my neighborhood/community Corona Queens, I have been helping my people with complicated paperwork and translations at no cost. It might not add up to too much to you, but to me is it a life-long-fulfilling-destiny to make the country I live in my home. Yes, my home, and like in my home I make ethical, moral, educational, research-based decisions that will best benefit my family. It is in this same way that I want to make decisions for my first home: NY. Therefore I, a long time New Yorker, believe strongly that passing Introduction 1867 is not just the right thing to do but the most beneficial action that can be executed for the benefit and wellbeing not just of our fellow New Yorkers but to our home itself: New York.

During this ongoing pandemic, half of all frontline, essential workers are immigrants; and 1 in 5 are noncitizen New Yorkers. We are asked to risk our lives serving as medical professionals, keeping pharmacies and grocery stores open, and keeping our buildings clean. We get 'thank you' for making sure the city kept running while the rest worked from home, but at the same time we have no real voice in government. We have no real way to hold the powerful accountable.

We shouldn't be afraid of letting more New Yorkers participate in our democracy. We should be leading the fight to expand voting rights and be a model for the rest of the country. So many other places are taking away people's voting rights. We have to stand up and fight back against voter suppression and disenfranchisement. New York City has to lead the country and say that people who live here, who make New York City what it is, should be able to choose their elected leadership.

Lastly, 34 council members have put their names on this bill. That is more than enough votes to pass. I urge the city council to do the right thing and pass this legislation immediately. Thank you.



Testimony of Estrella Gonzalez

Committee on Governmental Operations
Council Member Fernando Cabrera, Chair
Introduction 1867 - Municipal Voting Rights
September 20, 2021

Good morning Chair Cabrera and members of the committee:

I am Estrella Gonzalez, a member of Faith in New York. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of Introduction 1867, to expand voting rights in New York City elections to nearly one million noncitizen New Yorkers.

The City of New York is well known as the “Melting Pot” of America because of its massive diversity, yet New York residents are denied the right to vote due to their immigration status. Voting is important to the undocumented community members that are parents of U.S citizen children and to those that have DACA and work authorization. They've been paying their taxes and have started many small businesses. Yet, despite all these efforts, up to one million people are unable to vote within their local elections. They should have a say in their community and especially for the future of their children. Without the votes of the undocumented residents, communities and neighborhoods will not get the right support to improve the lives of the future of New York City.

During this pandemic, about half of the essential workers in New York City were immigrants. Immigrants that risk their lives serving as medical professionals, keeping pharmacies and grocery stores open, and keeping our buildings clean. Many families were affected by the pandemic because they had to go out and work to provide for their families because many couldn't qualify for unemployment or work from home. It's an injustice to say that they don't have a voice in their communities when they are the ones that keep this city running.

As a resident of New York City and a frontline worker, I support expanding voting rights to 1 million New Yorkers, documented and undocumented. I live in Sunset Park, Brooklyn, where the majority population is Hispanic and Chinese. Many of my neighbors, friends, and I are unable to vote due to our immigration status. We have been living in silence and letting others take our voices away. I'm demanding and urging every resident of New York to stand together and let our voices be heard, regardless of our immigration status.

Every individual needs their voice counted, as in the census. Being a DACA recipient who pays taxes and contributes to the city I should also have the right to vote. We shouldn't be afraid of getting more New Yorkers to participate in our democracy. We should be leading the fight to expand voting rights and be a model for the rest of the country. So many other places are taking away peoples' voting rights.

34 council members have put their names on this bill. That is more than enough votes to pass. I urge the city council to do the right thing and pass this legislation immediately.

Testimony of the Guyanese American Workers United [GAWU]

cmgawu@aol.com, [C] 917-697-8142

Committee on Governmental Affairs

Council Member Fernando Cabrera, Chairman

Intro. 1867-Municipal Voting Rights

September 20, 2021

Good day, Chairman Cabrera and members of the committee. I am Charles Hetram Mohan [known to all as Chuck], president of the Guyanese American Workers United. I thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of Introduction 1867, to expand voting rights in New York City elections to nearly one million noncitizens New Yorkers.

GAWU, is one of the original organizations that began this struggle twenty years ago to restore municipal voting rights to New York City noncitizen residents.

VOTING is a HUMAN RIGHT. Continue denying approximately one million New York City residents the right to vote is an affront to democracy and dilute the significance of the true meaning of our revolutionary slogan, “no taxation without representation,” since they pay approximately \$19 in New York State income tax.

“Voting embodies the core principles of equality and freedom that helps to define our democracy.” There is nothing in our federal or state constitutions that prohibits noncitizen voting. Democracy can only be strengthened when those that are disenfranchised are given the right to vote and participate in our decision-making process that affect their lives. It is only then they will be living out the true meaning of freedom, equality and democracy.

New York City is usually referred to as the capital city of the world and the main reason is its multicultural diversity of immigrants. In Queens alone more than 130 languages are spoken. “It is a model for the world for the world on how from diverse backgrounds can live and work together in society.”

Immigrants have made unparalleled contribution to New York City in ever aspect of life imaginable. They have helped to elevate the quality of life for everyone never seen before and when it counted the most, during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Aptly put by the Our City/Our Vote committee, "During this pandemic, half of all frontline essential workers are immigrants and 1 in 5 are noncitizen New Yorkers. We asked them to risk their lives serving as medical professionals, keeping pharmacies and grocery stores open, and keeping our buildings clean. How can we tell them thanks for making sure the city kept running while the rest of us worked from home, but then also tell them we don't care that they have no real voice in government? They have no real way to hold the powerful accountable." They were also those supermarket workers, delivery persons and others who risk their lives to provide us with services in the comfort and safety of our homes.

While many other factors were reasons for this noncitizen voting to be a reality previously, the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the necessity why noncitizens need a voice in our decision making. If they can put their lives on the line for us the least, we can do is give them the right to vote in our municipal elections.

Over 40 countries in the world have some form of immigrant voting and 6 municipalities in the state of Maryland: Takoma Park, Barnesville, Martin's Additions, Somerset, Garrett Park, Chevy Chase-most of Montgomery County, regardless of citizenship status.

New York City is the leading city of this nation, let us act as a leader and set the example for the rest of the nation to follow.

On behalf of the Guyanese American Workers United I implore the New York City Council to do the noble and right thing and pass this legislation. This will guarantee an eternal legacy for each and every one of you. Something the immigrants of New York City will be forever grateful.

In the words of Horace Mann, "Be ashamed to die until you have achieved a victory for humanity."

Thank You

Goddard Riverside

INVESTING IN PEOPLE, STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY

**Committee on Governmental Operations
Council Member Fernando Cabrera, Chair
Introduction 1867 - Municipal Voting Rights
September 20, 2021**

Dear Honorable Chair Cabrera and members of the committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of Introduction 1867, to expand voting rights in New York City elections to nearly one million noncitizen New Yorkers. Goddard Riverside is a proud member and supporter of the “Our City Our Vote” Coalition.

“Nothing about us without us” and **“no taxation without representation”** ring true for all and certainly should apply for the nearly one million of our fellow New Yorkers are denied the right to vote. These are our coworkers, neighbors, and friends. Many of them have lived in this city for a long time and are an essential component of our city.

These New Yorkers have been contributing to our city. They've been paying taxes and have started almost half of all the small businesses in our city. Many are active in their communities. And yet back in June and potentially coming on election day in November, one million of them were unable to choose the elected officials who will make decisions that affect their lives every day. This is not right.

During this ongoing pandemic, half of all frontline, essential workers are immigrants; and 1 in 5 are noncitizen New Yorkers. We asked them to risk their lives serving as medical professionals, keeping pharmacies and grocery stores open, and keeping our buildings clean. How can we tell them thanks for making sure the city kept running, but then also tell them we don't care that they have no real voice in government? They have no real way to hold the powerful accountable.

We shouldn't be afraid of letting more New Yorkers participate in our democracy. We should be leading the fight to expand voting rights and be a model for the rest of the country. So many other places are taking away peoples' voting rights. We have to stand up and fight back against voter suppression and disenfranchisement. New York City has to lead the country and say that people who live here, who make New York City what it is, should be able to choose their elected leadership. Thirty-three council members have put their names on this bill. That is more than enough votes to pass. We urge the city council to do the right thing and pass this legislation immediately.

Sincerely,

Larry Wood,
Director of Organizing



LatinoJustice PRLDEF Statement in Support of Introduction 1867

Testimony of Fulvia Vargas-De Leon **Associate Counsel, LatinoJustice PRLDEF**

September 20, 2021

LatinoJustice PRLDEF (LatinoJustice), originally established as the Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund in 1972, is one of the country's leading nonprofit civil rights legal defense funds. As part of our ongoing work to protect the rights of Latino voters, we have long advocated to ensure the enfranchisement of those who were traditionally excluded from our democracy and often resorting to legal action to challenge those barriers and practices that seek to dilute or suppress the right to vote.

LatinoJustice stands firmly in support of Introduction 1867 to allow for noncitizens with federal work authorization to vote in New York City (NYC) municipal elections. We believe it crucial that NYC implement this policy to restore and uphold the democratic principles our nation was founded upon, to continue its embodiment of and alignment with immigrant integration & inclusion policies, and to promote civic engagement within. At a time where many states across the nation are enacting broad voter suppression laws to make it more difficult to participate in the franchise, NYC should be in the lead in enacting legislation that seeks to enfranchise close to one million New Yorkers who currently have no voice in the electoral process.

Barring the non-citizen vote is rooted in a long history of suppressing formal political involvement from marginalized communities. Groups seeking to exclude such groups from political involvement have often relied on discriminatory voting policies and practices, such as property ownership, level of education & literacy and poll taxes among other measures - requiring citizenship status for local elections is no different. Prior to 1928, most states and territories allowed noncitizen voting at the local and state level and its allowance was rooted in the democratic principle that those who reside in a community and that have invested in it, have stake there and know what is good for it¹.

During the U.S.'s expansion West, racism and nationalism disguised as manifest destiny prompted white supremacists to deem Native Americans unworthy of a vote, thus denying the vote to dwellers of the land as was customary. During the antebellum period, the confederacy eliminated the non-citizen vote because the bloc was predominantly abolitionist and then reallocated the practice when the region was met with a labor shortage. Leading up to World War I, most states began eliminating the practice due to a rise in xenophobia, racism, and nationalism. By 1928, all states—most with the support of the women's suffrage movement—had fully eliminated noncitizen voting and implemented many policies to curb minority voting. Furthermore, Citizenship has never been a constitutional pre-requisite for voting and history indicates, instead, that localities and states looked at a person's domicile to determine whether they

¹ Monet Gonnerman & Ryan Willett, Noncitizen Voting: A Case Study of Oregon, 25 Lewis & Clark L. Rev. 361, 366 & 388 (2021)



were allowed to vote². The notion that citizenship is required for voting is new when put in context of American history, and its practice emerges from white supremacist ideology³.

Moreover, NYC has a recent history with noncitizen voting. For more than 30 years, non-citizen residents were allowed to vote in local school board elections. This was the practice from 1968 until 2002 when the practice was terminated due to the city's change to an appointment system⁴. We recognized then that non-citizen should have a say and be actively engaged in the manner in which their community schools were managed. Thus, what we are seeking here is actually a restoration of the right to vote in local elections which have a consequential effect on the day-to-day life of the community.

Despite eliminating the sole channel whereby immigrants could formally participate in the political process, NYC has shifted its policy focus in support and integration of immigrants and granting the non-citizen vote fits squarely with that priority. Former Mayor Bloomberg's Executive Order⁵ providing for confidentiality of immigrants when accessing municipal agency benefits and services, programs such as NYC ID and the publicizing of immigrants' rights and services on official NYC pages begins to recognize the worth of immigrants and helps to support immigrant communities, but those are the bare minimum. Our city relies on immigrant labor, culture, and purchasing power to drive its economy. Former NYC chief demographer Joseph J. Salvo's main concern regarding recovery post-pandemic was remaining an attractive city for immigrants since they are critical to the NYC's livelihood and there is a dwindling number of immigrants coming to NYC since 2016⁶. Our focus can no longer overlook the contributions of immigrants. Our city must forge a symbiotic relationship whereby immigrants also have a meaningful say in their labor standards, housing, taxation, and education of their children.

The enfranchisement of thousands of New Yorkers cannot be understated. Introduction 1867 would enfranchise approximately 662,000 green card holders alone, not including those with work authorization⁷. In addition, implementing 1867 would encourage civic participation in NYC. By allowing noncitizens to vote, NYC simultaneously prepares noncitizens to practice and assimilate into citizenship activities and forms a strong civic tradition in new American families. This is especially important considering that in NYC, Latino and Asians "lag well behind both whites and African Americans at each step of political incorporation, including voter turnout⁸." One of the explanations posited for this occurrence is that those communities are "generally

² *Id.* at 368.

³ *See Id.*

⁴ A Report from the Master's Program in Public Administration Colin Powell School for Civic and Global Leadership Noncitizen Voting In New York City, The City College of New York, https://www.ccny.cuny.edu/sites/default/files/Noncitizen%20Voting%202015%20Revisedpdf_3.pdf.

⁵ NY City Executive Order [Bloomberg] No. 41 of 2003.

⁶ Annie Correal, How N.Y.C.'s Population Expert Says the City Will Bounce Back, The New York Times, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/01/nyregion/nyc-population-pandemic-recovery.html>

⁷ State of Our Immigrant City, New York City Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs, https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/immigrants/downloads/pdf/moia_annual_report_2018_final.pdf

⁸ Katherine Garrity, 2018-2019 Voter Analysis Report, New York City Campaign Finance Board, https://nycfb.info/pdf/Voter_Analysis_Report_2019.pdf.

immigrant-based⁹.” Allowing noncitizen voting, then, poses a viable solution for garnering stronger civic participation.

Civic engagement cannot exist in a vacuum where arbitrary benchmarks are set in place on who gets to participate and who is excluded. Introduction 1867 is a signal of the conundrum that exist in calling many in the immigrant community our essential workers, expecting them to show up and risk their lives for this city, yet still denying them the ability to have their voices heard when it comes to the electoral process. By passing noncitizen voting, NYC simultaneously rids its political process of discriminatory underpinnings and aligns itself with its current policy priorities. It is time to change this arbitrary practice and empower all of our community to act and effect change through voting.

Fulvia Vargas-De Leon
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Research and drafting assistance provided by
Brian Lozano, CUNY Law School Class of 2022
LatinoJustice PRLDEF Nixon Peabody Summer 2021 Civil Rights Fellow

⁹ *Id.*

Personal additions to script supporting Intro 1867 ***Municipal Voting Rights***

Bill Meehan, Executive Vice President, Lesbian Gay Democratic Club of Queens (LGDCQ)

9/20/21

(Insert)

I live in Stonewall House in Fort Greene. Before moving there last year I was a long time resident in Jackson Heights, and for approximately 10 years before moving my home was an open and safe space for newly arrived Guatemalans who came here for safety and to be able to assist the families they left behind. They were from the same family, bound together by blood or marriage and here, we formed family. Over the years about a dozen came...some stayed a few weeks, others a few months, others, a number of years. I'm the legal guardian of the youngest....all are my family. They all had a fear of flying so their route to my front door was a bit circuitous!

I can't imagine opening my house and then telling my family that the kitchen is out of bounds or that they can't use the computer...just doesn't make sense. Either you're family, or you're not!

We are a sanctuary city, we take pride in saying that, and we should but if we truly want to welcome folks here it should be with open arms and we should allow them to participate in the life of the city...they are not second class.... they, like us, are New Yorkers.

This legislation allows them to assume the responsibilities that come with the hospitality we offered. This legislation benefits us also as empowering them to act as full citizens will help make us a better and safer city.

I strongly support this legislation. It's passage would benefit my family, so many of our fellow New Yorkers and the City as a whole.

Written Testimony of Nonprofit New York
Support for Introduction 1867 - Expanding Municipal Voting Rights
New York City Council Committee on Governmental Operations Meeting on September 20, 2021

To: Council Member Fernando Cabrera, Chair of Committee on Governmental Operations

From: Celine Yip, Research & Data Coordinator of Nonprofit New York

Date: September 20, 2021

Dear Chair Cabrera and members of the committee,

I am Celine Yip of Nonprofit New York. Thank you for the opportunity to testify; I am here to speak in support of passing Intro 1867, to expand voting rights in New York City elections to nearly one million noncitizen New Yorkers.

We live in a democracy, yet nearly one million of our fellow New Yorkers are denied the right to vote. And these New Yorkers contribute to our city. These New Yorkers have been paying taxes and have started almost half of all the small businesses in New York City. And during this ongoing pandemic, half of all frontline, essential workers are immigrants; and 1 in 5 are noncitizen New Yorkers.

We asked them to risk their lives serving as medical professionals, keeping pharmacies and grocery stores open, and keeping our buildings clean. Yet back in June, nearly one million New Yorkers were unable to choose the elected officials who would go on to make decisions that affect their lives every day. This is not right. These New Yorkers are barred from being able to hold the powerful accountable.

At Nonprofit New York we recognize that the past year has provided powerful illustrations of why we must not take our democracy for granted. Making sure that all New Yorkers have their voices heard, supporting voter education, and encouraging participation are not partisan or political issues — they are responsibilities.

We shouldn't be afraid of letting more New Yorkers participate in our democracy. New York City has to lead the country and say that people who live here should be able to choose their elected leadership.

This issue is important to Nonprofit New York, and personal to me. I am the daughter of a Cambodian refugee. I grew up in a household so poor we could not afford heating and had recurring bouts of housing instability. Because of this, my mother was forced to work two full time jobs at times. My

mother worked hard. She contributed to our economy. She was engaged in our community. She deserves her right to vote.

Luckily, because of her refugee status my mother received US citizenship, but she is not the norm. The naturalization process can take years to complete and is expensive. Foreign-born residents like my mother deserve and need the right to elect someone to represent their needs.

33 council members have put their names on this bill. That is more than enough votes to pass. I urge the city council to do the right thing and pass this legislation immediately. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,
Celine Yip
Research & Data Coordinator

Testimony of Queens Community House
Committee on Governmental Operations
Council Member Fernando Cabrera, Chair
Introduction 1867 - Municipal Voting Rights
September 20, 2021

Queens Community House is proud to submit our testimony on behalf of Introduction 1867 to expand voting rights in New York City elections to nearly one million noncitizen New Yorkers.

On November 2nd, many of us will have the opportunity to participate in one of the most fundamental rituals of our democracy. We get to vote for our local representatives (mayor, controller, public advocate, city councilperson, borough president). These are the people who, over the next four years, will make many of the decisions that impact our day-to-day lives – decisions relating to public education; housing; transportation, roads and infrastructure; parks and communal spaces; and healthcare and social services. They are the people who will get to decide how to spend our tax money, and in doing so determine what is a priority for our society – and what it not.

But many of our neighbors in Queens will be unable to participate in this process because they do not yet have citizen status. They are here legally, and as such they pay taxes at the same rate as all of us. But they have no say in how their tax money is spent. Their children attend our public schools – but they have no say in our education policy. Many are active members of our communities – they work, own businesses, go to church/temple/mosques, attend community board meetings, and volunteer for non-profit organizations. But their positions and values are not expressed politically in any way.

This is not only unfair to them; it is disadvantageous to all of us, and a misrepresentation of democracy. If we truly embrace the principle of democracy, then we must recognize its value is not just for the individual but for the whole of society. We must also acknowledge that full democracy in this country has never been a reality but rather an ideal. Many of the groups who now have voting rights (women, African-Americans, Chinese-Americans, etc.) did not have them for much of our nation's history. Our country has slowly made progress over 250 years towards a *real democracy* (at times two steps forward, one step back as we're still seeing today), but there have been moments where we have made huge leaps, in particular the suffragette movement of the early 20th century and the civil rights movement of the 1950s and '60s. It is time for another such leap, and noncitizen voting in local elections is the first step.

We know from experience that our communities are strongest, safest, and best served when they have the participation of all their residents. As the old adage says, with power comes responsibility. If we want our neighbors to be engaged citizens, we have to offer them participation in one of our most basic mechanisms for decision-making – the vote. Local elections do not decide foreign policy, they do not determine international relations or how we defend ourselves from enemy nations; they decide local matters and the use



Strengthening Neighborhoods Inspiring Change

of locally-collected taxes. Many of the neighborhoods in Queens we serve are under-resourced, primarily because the true size of their resident base is unrepresented at the table. This must change.

Queens Community House serves 25,000 residents in 14 different Queens neighborhoods across Queens each year. Queens is arguably the most diverse county in the United States and, in many ways, it represents our future in a global world: one where people from many different countries live side by side, sharing concerns, aspirations, and a common humanity if not a common passport. In this world, municipal voting rights will not undermine national identity but will instead strengthen a country's communities and enjoin everyone in a universal human nation that must respond to rising planetary challenges (such as the COVID and climate change crises). New York City is one of the world's first universal cities, and as such we have both an opportunity and an obligation to lead the way.

Queens Community House therefore urges the City Council to hold a vote and pass this critical legislation. Thirty-three Council Members have put their names on this bill as sponsors. We ask all City Council Members to give their voices to ensure that all of our neighbors have a voice. Thank you for giving us the opportunity to testify on this pivotal bill.



**Testimony of Saraí Rodríguez
member of the Street Vendor Project**

Committee on Governmental Operations
Council Member Fernando Cabrera, Chair
Introduction 1867 - Municipal Voting Rights
September 20, 2021

Dear City Council,

My name is Saraí Rodríguez, and I am a member of the Street Vendor Project. First, I want to thank you all for the opportunity to testify on behalf of Introduction 1867, a bill that seeks to extend voting rights in New York City elections to nearly one million non-citizen New Yorkers.

I have lived in the Corona neighborhood of Queens for more than 15 years, almost 20. I have a Mexican food stand in Manhattan, on Broadway between 30th and 31st Streets. I knew that my life and my future are here, in New York, when my children started going to school. There I saw that parents participated in the association and that there are ways to exercise our voice, but not having the ability to vote discouraged me from participating.

I want the city council to approve introduction 1867 because in the street vending sector there are immigrants from many countries. We have been living in this city for a long time, we are your co-workers, neighbors, and friends. Being able to exercise our voice along with our vote would make us stronger, it would give us more confidence to fight for and reform the street vending system.

When I arrived from Mexico I had no plans to become a legal citizen but very soon I will have the opportunity to become one. When I arrived from Mexico I had no plans to open a business, but as soon as the opportunity presented itself I opened it and now I have my own business. Give us the opportunity to continue strengthening the democratic values of this great city.

We shouldn't be afraid of letting more New Yorkers participate in our democracy. We should be leading the fight to expand voting rights and be a model for the rest of the country. New York City has to lead the country and say that people who live here, who make New York City what it is, should be able to choose their elected leadership.

33 council members have put their names on this bill. That is more than enough votes to pass. I urge the city council to do the right thing and pass this legislation immediately.

Querido Consejo Municipal,

Mi nombre es Saraí Rodríguez y soy miembro del Proyecto de Vendedores Ambulantes. Primeramente, les quiero agradecer por la oportunidad de testificar en nombre de la Introducción 1867, una propuesta de ley que intenta ampliar los derechos de voto en las elecciones de la ciudad de Nueva York a casi un millón de neoyorquinos no ciudadanos.

Yo radico en el barrio de Corona, Queens por más de 15 años, casi 20. Yo tengo un puesto de comida mexicana en Manhattan, sobre la Broadway entre las calles 30 y 31. Yo supe que mi vida y mi futuro están aquí, en Nueva York cuando mis hijos empezaron a ir a la escuela. Ahí yo vi que los padres participaron en la asociación y que hay maneras de ejercer su voz, pero al no tener el voto se me hizo difícil participar.

Yo quiero que el concejo municipal apruebe la introducción 1867 porque en el sector de la venta ambulante hay muchos inmigrantes de muchos países. Llevamos mucho tiempo viviendo en esta ciudad, somos sus compañeros de trabajo, vecinos y amigos. El tener la posibilidad de ejercer nuestra voz junto con nuestro voto nos haría más fuertes, nos daría una confianza muy importante para luchar y reformar el sistema de la venta ambulante.

Cuando llegue de México no tenía planes de hacerme un ciudadano legal pero muy pronto tendré la oportunidad de serlo. Cuando llegue de México no tenía planes para abrir un negocio, pero en cuanto la oportunidad se me presentó yo lo abrí y ahora tengo mi propio negocio. Danos la oportunidad para que sigamos fortaleciendo los valores democráticos de esta gran ciudad.

No deberíamos tener miedo de dejar que más neoyorquinos participen en nuestra democracia. La ciudad de Nueva York tiene que liderar el país y decir que las personas que viven aquí, que hacen de la ciudad de Nueva York lo que es, deben poder elegir a sus dirigentes.

33 concejales han apoyado esta propuesta de ley. Son más que suficientes votos para que se apruebe. Insisto en que el consejo municipal haga lo correcto y apruebe esta legislación inmediatamente.



Testimony before the New York City Council Committee on
Governmental Operations
September 20, 2021

Presented by:
Lea Giddins, Senior Program and Policy Manager
Women Creating Change
lgiddins@wccny.org

Women Creating Change is an inclusive community that partners with organizations and with New York City women who have been systemically excluded from civic processes to develop programs and influence policies that result in more equitable civic engagement.

www.wccny.org

My name is Lea Giddins and I am the Senior Program and Policy Manager at [Women Creating Change](#), a nonprofit that increases civic engagement awareness and opportunities for women who have been systemically excluded from civic processes. Thank you to Chair Cabrera and members of the New York City Council Committee on Governmental Operations for the opportunity to submit testimony.

I am testifying today in support of [Int.1867](#) to expand voting rights to nearly one million New Yorkers with work authorizations, and green cards.

At Women Creating Change, we have been advocating for voting rights and civic engagement for more than 100 years. We recently launched our new signature initiative, Civic Matters, an innovative program that disrupts systemic barriers to civic engagement for women and creates opportunities for learning and more equitable civic participation.

Just last year, we celebrated the centennial of the ratification of the 19th Amendment. Although it was the single [greatest expansion of voting rights](#) in U.S. history, it failed to enfranchise women of color, who were forced to wait until the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 to gain the right to vote.

Having been directly involved in the women's suffrage movement, WCC is proud to raise our voices once again to expand democracy as part of the [Our City, Our Vote Coalition](#), led by our incredible partners the [New York Immigration Coalition](#) and [United Neighborhood Houses](#), community members, and other coalition partners. The legislation is a natural extension of WCC's early work to secure women's suffrage.

Immigrants have always been vital to our city. Never has that been more true than during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Half of all frontline, essential workers are immigrants, and one in five are noncitizens. They make up:

- [53% of grocery and pharmacy workers \(27% noncitizens\)](#)
- [53% of healthcare workers \(16% noncitizens\)](#)
- [70% of building cleaning workers \(36% noncitizens\)](#)

New York City cannot have a fair and just COVID-19 recovery plan if the New Yorkers who are most impacted by the pandemic cannot vote for the people who will make the recovery decisions. We owe it to frontline heroes to finally include their voices and their votes as our city moves forward.

Noncitizen voting is not without historical precedent and in many ways, Intro. 1867 would be a re-enfranchisement of voting rights. Prior to World War I, [immigrants could vote in local, state and congressional races throughout the country](#) (even though Black Americans and women could not). There are already successful immigrant municipal voting programs in [San Francisco, Takoma Park, Maryland, and more than 45 countries](#).

Now is the time to rethink what a 21st-century democracy looks like. In New York City, the quintessential city of immigrants, democracy should be inclusive of and accountable to everyone who calls it home.

On a personal note, I was born and raised in New York City and have lived here most of my life. I want all of my neighbors to have the right to participate in this core civic process. Passing Int. 1867 is the right thing to do and would make me even prouder to be a lifelong New Yorker.

New York City should be encouraging greater civic engagement and mobilizing our communities to advocate for good public policies that invest in and enhance our city. Expanding the right to vote in city elections provides more New Yorkers the opportunity to have a say on issues that affect them, and will strengthen the voices of all our communities.

We know that local contests are often just as consequential as federal or state-level elections. It is past time we afforded all New Yorkers the right to have a say in how their neighborhoods are governed. New York City has an opportunity to stand firm in its commitment to our immigrant neighbors.

Thank you to the more than 33 City Council members who already support this bill. I urge the City Council to immediately put this bill to a vote to realize a more just and equitable democracy. WCC looks forward to partnering with the City Council to create the fully enfranchised, just, and representative city that we know is possible.



Testimony before the New York City Council Committee on
Governmental Operations
September 20, 2021

Presented by:
Carole Wacey, President and CEO
Women Creating Change
cwacey@wccny.org

Women Creating Change is an inclusive community that partners with organizations and with New York City women who have been systemically excluded from civic processes to develop programs and influence policies that result in more equitable civic engagement.

www.wccny.org

My name is Carole Wacey and I am the President and CEO of [Women Creating Change](#), a nonprofit that increases civic engagement awareness and opportunities for women who have been systemically excluded from civic processes. Thank you to Chair Cabrera and members of the New York City Council Committee on Governmental Operations for the opportunity to submit testimony.

I am testifying today in support of [Int.1867](#) to expand voting rights to nearly one million New Yorkers with work authorizations, and green cards.

At Women Creating Change, we have been advocating for voting rights and civic engagement for more than 100 years, and in 2021, the work continues. Just last year, we celebrated the centennial of the ratification of the 19th Amendment — though it was the single [greatest expansion of voting rights](#) in U.S. history, it failed to enfranchise women of color, who were forced to wait until the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 to gain the right to vote.

Having been directly involved in the women's suffrage movement, WCC is proud to raise our voices once again to expand democracy as part of the [Our City, Our Vote Coalition](#), led by our incredible partners, the [New York Immigration Coalition](#) and [United Neighborhood Houses](#). The legislation is a natural extension of WCC's early work to secure women's suffrage.

Over my 30-year career, I have worked in the politics, policy, philanthropy, nonprofit, media, and advocacy sectors. My work at WCC is a return to policy work and my deep activist roots. My own family immigrated to the New York City area from the UK in the 1960s, and my parents, siblings and I were all green card holders. My feminist mother always encouraged civic participation in our new home country, including advocating for the Equal Rights Amendment, social security, and pay equity from an early age.

Despite being an engaged citizen, I could not vote until I became an American citizen in the early 1990's. Once I could, voting became a cornerstone of my American experience and making my voice heard. I vividly remember the pride I felt in casting my first general election ballot, voting for Bill Clinton for President. The experience came full circle when I later joined his administration as a political appointee.

Immigrants have always been vital to our city. Never has that been more true than during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Half of all frontline, essential workers are immigrants, and one in five are noncitizens. They make up:

- 53% of grocery and pharmacy workers (27% noncitizens)
- 53% of healthcare workers (16% noncitizens)
- 70% of building cleaning workers (36% noncitizens)

New York City cannot have a fair and just COVID-19 recovery plan if those New Yorkers who were most impacted by the pandemic cannot vote for the people who will make those recovery decisions. We owe it to our frontline heroes to finally include their voices and their votes as our city moves forward.

Noncitizen voting is not without historical precedent and in many ways, Intro. 1867 would be a re-enfranchisement of voting rights. Prior to World War I, [immigrants could vote in local, state and congressional races throughout the country](#) (even though Black Americans and women could not). There are already successful immigrant municipal voting programs in [San Francisco, Takoma Park, Maryland, and more than 45 countries](#).

Now is the time to rethink what a 21st-century democracy looks like. In New York City, the quintessential city of immigrants, democracy should be inclusive of and accountable to everyone who calls it home.

New York City should be encouraging greater civic engagement and mobilizing our communities to advocate for good public policies that invest in and enhance our city. Expanding the right to vote in city elections provides more New Yorkers the opportunity to have a say on issues that affect them, and will strengthen the voices of all our communities.

We know that local contests are often just as consequential as federal or state-level elections. It is past time we afforded all New Yorkers the right to have a say in how their neighborhoods are governed. New York City has an opportunity to stand firm in its commitment to our immigrant neighbors.

Thank you to the more than 33 City Council members already support this bill. I urge the City Council to immediately put this bill to a vote to realize a more just and equitable democracy. WCC looks forward to partnering with the City Council to create the fully enfranchised, just, and representative city that we know is possible.

Testimony of Bernardo Plata
from Queens Community House

Committee on Governmental Operations

Council Member Fernando Cabrera, Chair

Introduction 1867 - Municipal Voting Rights

August, 31st 2021

Good morning Chair Cabrera and members of the committee. I am Bernardo Plata, an immigrant that moved to New York 20 years ago. I have been a New York Citizen for the past 3 years and a New York resident for the previous 17 years. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of Introduction 1867, to expand voting rights in New York City elections to my fellow resident New Yorkers.

We live in a democracy, and yet nearly one million of our fellow New Yorkers are denied the right to vote. These are my coworkers, family, neighbors, and friends. Many of them have lived in this city like myself, for a very long time, or even more.

I am a retired senior New Yorker who moved from Colombia to New York - Forest Hills to be precise- 20 years ago. I am very involved in my community, I've been a member of Queens Community House for more than 3 years now. At QCH I attend the English Classes program, the Senior Center, and the advocacy and organizing Action Group.

I have been a New York citizen for 3 years and have been resident for the previous 17 years. In 17 years I worked, I paid taxes, but never vote. I remember the first time I voted in New York was 3 years ago, after becoming a citizen, for NYC governor. I remember how I felt. I felt empowered, I felt like my voice was important. It was a great experience because I finally was entitled to the right of deciding who my representative was. I want my fellow NYC residents to be able to do the same.

I support Introduction 1867 because I believe that it is important for all of us who legally reside in New York to be able to elect our representatives in the City level. New York residents contribute to the city in many ways, they pay taxes, they work, they are the backbone of our City. They deserve the right to vote our local elected officials.

Everyone's voices and ideas should count when it comes to decide who represents us, our issues, our problems, and our neighborhoods. Nearly one million New

Yorkers are being denied this fundamental right to vote. They deserve to have a say and participate in local elections, they deserve to have a say when it comes to electing representatives that make decisions about our community, our transportation, our health, our work rights.

We have to stand up and fight back against voter suppression and disenfranchisement. New York City has to lead the country and say that people who live here, who make New York City what it is, should be able to choose their elected leadership.

33 council members have put their names on this bill. That is more than enough votes to pass. I urge the city council to do the right thing and pass this legislation immediately.

Testimony of Crystal Hudson, Democratic Nominee for the 35th City Council District

Committee on Governmental Operations
Council Member Fernando Cabrera, Chair
Introduction 1867-2020
September 20, 2021, 10am

Good morning Chair Cabrera and members of the committee. My name is Crystal Hudson, and I am the Democratic nominee for the 35th City Council District. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of Intro. 1867, which would permit New York residents who are either green card holders or hold valid work authorization to vote in municipal elections.

I am the daughter of Jamaican and Honduran immigrants, with deep roots in Brooklyn that span three generations. My family's experience has driven me to center the lived experiences of immigrant communities in everything I do. Our city's immigrant communities are diverse, both ethnically and in their ties to the United States. Many, like my mother, have been here for the majority of their lives while others, including dozens of voters I talked to over the past few months while campaigning prior to the Democratic primary, arrived more recently to find a means of fulfilling their dreams, furthering their careers, and financially supporting their families.

Immigrant communities define our city. New York's true culture is a multicultural one — defined by the New Yorkers who have moved to our city from across the globe for generations as well as the Lenape who wrongly saw their land falsely "purchased" by the Dutch nearly four centuries ago and the thousands of enslaved Africans who were taken from their homes and forcibly brought to New York. New Yorkers aren't just New Yorkers. We're Jamaican, Honduran, Indian, Dominican, Chinese, Puerto Rican, Pakistani, Mexican, Italian, Jewish, Filipino, Irish, Japanese, and dozens of other nationalities. And many of our small business owners, nurses, restaurateurs, grocery clerks, building workers, and more are immigrants, including noncitizens.

The pandemic showed us how time and again local communities, and immigrant communities in particular, band together when facing adversity to support one another, a foundational tenet of American democracy. As the founder of Greater Prospect Heights Mutual Aid, I organized neighbors over the past 17 months to ensure our neighbors' basic needs were met throughout the pandemic. We saw the fragility of our food system most clearly in our neighborhood's immigrant communities — as lost wages and a constricting economy meant many of our neighbors were food insecure. Thankfully, New Yorkers across the five boroughs, including many immigrants, joined up with their local mutual aid society and did what they could to ensure none of their neighbors went hungry.

Immigrants clearly already contribute to the various arms of civil society, providing goods and services, paying taxes, and volunteering for civic organizations. Green card holders are essentially non-citizens in name only, and many are in the process of applying for full citizenship. Now it's time to extend to them the ultimate tool for civic engagement: voting.

This isn't an unprecedented concept. Non-citizens were eligible to vote in local school board elections for four decades in our city before the State Legislature disbanded it when establishing mayoral control. And non-citizens are currently eligible to vote in the participatory budgeting process in the 33 council districts that utilize the program. In the U.S., a dozen municipalities already allow non-citizens to vote in local elections. By allowing nearly 1 million non-citizen New Yorkers to vote, New York City can be the first major city to extend the right to vote in all municipal elections, paving the way for a stronger democracy in our city and across the nation.

While I fully support this bill, I would urge the committee to consider the following when finalizing the bill's language and exploring its implementation.

- **Confidentiality:** The committee should consider amending the bill to clarify one aspect of its confidentiality provisions. In short, we must ensure that no publicly available materials indicate whether a voter is a municipal voter or a traditional voter. According to section 1057j, "for each municipal election, the New York city board of elections shall produce a single poll list that combines municipal voters and other registered voters under the New York state election law for each election district. [...] Poll list entries for municipal voters shall be marked with an 'M.'" Section 1057t then provides for confidentiality to ensure no inquiry can be made into the immigration status of a municipal voter and states that lists of municipal voters "shall not be published, distributed or otherwise provided to the public separately or distinctly from the complete voter registration list of all qualified voters." The bill should be amended to clarify that the publicly available complete voter registration list will *not* include any information identifying certain voters as registered municipal voters to maintain the confidentiality of the immigration status of these voters.
- **Public Awareness Campaign:** I urge the committee to consider legislation to finance and establish a citywide, culturally competent public awareness campaign in immigrant communities to ensure we register as many newly eligible New Yorkers as possible. Though the bill provides for notification of eligibility during the citizenship process and requires the Board of Elections to conduct outreach to advocacy groups and community associations, I recommend crafting legislation setting clear parameters for the Board of Elections' awareness campaign to ensure it is properly devised and executed, including provisions that (a) notify municipal voters of their need to reapply if they become full citizens if they want to also vote in federal and state elections, (b) impress upon municipal voters the importance of primaries in New York City politics and educate them on party options should they choose to register with one, and (c) ensures local community organizations handle translation and outreach services, as suggested already by the existing bill.
- **Advisory Board:** I also urge the committee to consider transferring the advisory committee's purview to the Board of Elections once various reform measures have passed. While an advisory group is an acceptable solution in the short term to ensure the bill's efficacy is regularly reviewed and necessary amendments are made, this

advisory will not have the expertise of the civil servants who handle these municipal voter applications and oversee elections each year. Once the Board of Elections is in a place to be trusted with this functionality and it is professionalized, this committee should consider dissolving the advisory board and delegating advisory responsibility to the Board of Elections.

- **Poll Working Training:** We must ensure the New York City Board of Elections provides proper training for poll workers to ensure they understand the differences between standard voters and the newly created category of municipal voters. Though the bill dictates these voters should not form a separate line and use the same process as other voters, an untrained worker may accidentally give a municipal voter the incorrect ballot, thus leading to an invalid vote and potentially subjecting the municipal voter to legal action. As such, poll worker training on this matter should be top priority.

I urge the committee to pass this bill out of committee and call on Speaker Johnson to quickly hold a vote so that the full Council can pass this legislation and ensure non-citizen New Yorkers are eligible to vote as soon as the upcoming 2023 municipal election. Thank you.

Testimony of Queens Community House

Committee on Governmental Operations

Council Member Fernando Cabrera, Chair

Introduction 1867 - Municipal Voting Rights

August, 31st 2021

Good [morning/afternoon] Chair Cabrera and members of the committee. I am Deisy Cubides. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of Introduction 1867, to expand voting rights in New York City elections to nearly one million noncitizen New Yorkers.

We live in a democracy, and yet nearly one million of our fellow New Yorkers are denied the right to vote. These are our coworkers, neighbors, and friends. Many of them have lived in this city for a long time.

These New Yorkers have been contributing to our city. They've been paying taxes and have started almost half of all the small businesses in our city. Many are active in their communities. And yet back in June, one million of them were unable to choose the elected officials who will make decisions that affect their lives every day. This is not right.

I am a volunteer in the Action Group in QCH and also a student from ESOL. I moved from my country to Richmond Hill in Queens one year and half, but in this short time I learned how my neighborhood and NYC need to resolve many issues and the best way is the people have the opportunity to choose who represents them in government.

I believe is a great opportunity to nearly one million to have a say in the direction of our city.

I think many of new Yorkers who still be a permanent residents and for some reason they are not ready to be citizens, they feel vulnerable because they can't elect their representatives and they keep in silence about their worries and ideas on how to improve the conditions of live in their communities and the NYC

We shouldn't be afraid of letting more New Yorkers participate in our democracy. We should be leading the fight to expand voting rights and be a model for the rest of the country. So many other places are taking away

peoples' voting rights. New York City has to lead the country and say that people who live here, who make New York City what it is, should be able to choose their elected leadership

Testimony of Eman Nasim, Queens Community House

Committee on Governmental Operations

Council Member Fernando Cabrera, Chair

Introduction 1867 - Municipal Voting Rights

August 31st, 2021

Good morning, Chair Cabrera, and members of the committee. I am Eman Nasim. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of Introduction 1867, to expand voting rights in New York City elections to about one million noncitizen New Yorkers.

I am here today because I am one of those one million New Yorkers without a voice. I am a noncitizen DACA recipient, legal resident of New York City. I have been living in the United States for the past 20 years, always working hard, and paying my taxes. During all these years I have seen many cases of injustice, and this is an example of it.

In many ways, the political landscape of this city has been stuck with same politicians and powerful people making decisions and controlling the system. I'm here to testify and advocate for voting rights for legal residents in New York City. We deserve to have a say and vote for who we believe would be the right candidate.

I urge the city council to do the right thing and pass this legislation immediately. There are already 33 council members that support this bill, that is more than enough votes to pass.

Thank You.

Intro. 1867 The bill would provide a process for lawful permanent residents in New York city to vote in municipal elections.
Felicia Singh
9/20/2021

Good morning to Chair Cabrera and members of the committee. I am Felicia Singh, Democratic Nominee for the 32nd City Council District. It is an honor to testify on behalf of Intro. 1867, to expand voting rights in New York City elections to nearly one million noncitizen New Yorkers.

Voting rights are very much tied to the wellness and healing of our communities. The intersectionality between who can and cannot vote is directly correlated to who progresses and who is left behind in our communities. We are the greatest city in the world, a sanctuary city, a city of dreams and also a place where we leave behind almost 1 million people. It's time we close this gap of exclusivity.

I was raised in South Queens, home of Little Guyana, Punjab Ave and my own neighborhood of Ozone Park where residents immigrate from places like Sylhet, Bangladesh with hopes of a better life. Indo-Caribbeans, Punjabis, and Bangladeshis have contributed to our city for decades and still struggle to have equal opportunities for representation.

Over the years, I've done voter registration, led a civic association, and helped folks apply for their citizenship. I cannot forget the disappointment on our neighbors faces when they talk about how it feels to be unable to participate in democracy.

Non-citizen New Yorkers count for the Census every 10 years and then they are cut into or out of gerrymandered districts. The hardship of being an immigrant is felt devalued by the inability to vote for who makes decisions about their livelihoods and their lives. There is no such thing as 'immigration reform' without the ability to vote.

Non-citizens clean our streets, drive us around, mow our lawns, serve us our breakfast, wash our clothes, own 52% of our local businesses and pay taxes. The pandemic has shown us that our immigrant community members are the backbone of the city and essential. Expanding voting rights is crucial in moving towards a post-pandemic New York City.

While voting rights are being threatened by racism and bigotry across the country, it's time for NY to set an example and take a stand to finally give the power of the vote to all NYers.



Testimony of Shahana Hanif
Committee on Governmental Operations
Council Member Fernando Cabrera, Chair
Introduction 1867 - Municipal Voting Rights
September 20, 2021

Good [morning/afternoon] Chair Cabrera and members of the committee. I'm Shahana Hanif, the Democratic Nominee for New York City's 39th District. I'm here to speak in strong support of Intro 1867!

I'm running to represent my District because Kensington is my home and where my father arrived as a ship jumper 30 years ago from Chittagong, Bangladesh, building what is now the epicenter of working-class Bangladeshis in all of Brooklyn. In District 39, the Bangladeshi (most of whom are Muslim) community has been ignored and underserved by our city government for far too long. I'm running to change that and to fight locally for the changes all our immigrant communities deserve. This work for me is personal because I have seen first hand how our government and its policies have failed my neighbors.

As a daughter of Bangladeshi immigrants, I center immigrant justice in my organizing work and direct advocacy. I've taken this organizing to City Hall, working as the Bangladeshi Community Liaison and Director of Organizing and Community Engagement for current Council Member Brad Lander in District 39. In this role, I was able to bring targeted City services into Kensington, coordinate and mobilize actions to protect neighbors against ICE, NYPD surveillance, and hate crimes, and expand Participatory Budgeting within the district, but I know there is so much more work to be done legislatively.

I am testifying today on behalf of the Our City, Our Vote coalition, and the broader need for immigrant justice in our democracy. Non-citizens should, by default, have the right to vote in City elections. They should also run for office and be elected to lead. So many of the folks who are excluded from voting right now are front line workers, whose voices deserve to be heard - one in five essential workers are non-citizens. Passing Introduction 1867-2020 would allow almost one million green card holders the ability to vote.

Non-citizen voting is common and already exists in other aspects of our City! While working in City Hall, I ran Participatory Budgeting. Participatory Budgeting, for those who are unfamiliar, allows for public power over public funds, which has led to critical and creative reinvestments in our schools, streets, and parks conceived of and voted on by the people in my district. Participatory Budgeting is one of the few ways all New Yorkers, regardless of age or citizenship status, are able to meaningfully engage in civic life - green card holders and undocumented New Yorkers are able to vote in how our resources are allocated.

While PB will continue in our city, there is no form of civic participation, no form of accountability that substitutes for the ability to vote for our elected officials.

Non-citizen voting is a great start to a more inclusive democracy, but we also need to recognize that it doesn't end there - language inaccessibility is another barrier for immigrant communities from fully participating in the political process. I can't wait to work with Our City, Our Vote and other immigrant justice organizations to strive towards true radical language justice, where no one is abandoned, and no one is left behind in their share of fair and equitable care: starting at the ballot.

The time is now to pass this urgent legislation -- doing so is a part of our recovery for a just and equitable NYC, expanding our electorate, and being able to build a truly representative government and a multiracial democracy.

Statement for the Brooklyn Public Hearing on Our City, Our Vote / Intro 1867
Jennifer Gutierrez, Democratic Candidate for City Council, District 34

New York City is a city of immigrants but today, our city robs close to one million of our immigrant neighbors of their voice and their vote in our local elections.

Nearly **one million non-citizen New Yorkers** can't vote for Mayor, Comptroller, Public Advocate, Borough President, or City Council. They are tax payers, parents of school children, riders of the subway and buses, and business owners shut out of our democracy. They are New Yorkers who are my neighbors and my family members and every single one of them deserves a say in the future of our New York.

Those in power, in our city, and across the country, have a history of turning away from these communities they think they can ignore. Our policies are too often dictated by the wealthiest and the loudest voices. The pandemic has shown us how disparate our resources can be, how unjust our recoveries *are*.

As we slowly begin to recover from the devastation of COVID-19, we know many more challenges lay ahead - a massive housing crisis, continuing climate disasters and rampant inequality. As we saw in the past two years, those that bear the brunt of any crisis are disproportionately our immigrant neighbors. They are facing unprecedented levels of unemployment, eviction without relief, and on the front lines as essential workers making below minimum wage with a gross lack of access to health care. They've kept our community running, and we are leaving them behind.

This isn't just about individuals voting in elections, but rather an acknowledgment that the act of voting is a gateway to more civic engagement, to understanding their rights, to building a stronger connection to their communities and to our city's leaders. Non-Citizen voting forces those of us with future power to hear the will of all of our neighbors, to make laws that help them rather than leave them behind - to build a city that works for everyone.

Cities are the laboratory of our nation's democracy. When we pass this legislation, we will be setting an example surely to be followed by cities and governments across the country and the world. We need to give every New Yorker a voice that cannot be ignored, and non-citizen voting is just the megaphone to do the job.

Jennifer Gutierrez



Privilege being extended to white males has always been the pathology and power structure of this country. It is a sullied vestige of post-colonialism America. Historically, Black and Brown bodies on American soil have had their respective voices discounted. The existence and passage of Naturalization Act of 1790 which limited citizenship to "any alien, being a free white person" who had been in the U.S. for two years, is one relic that supported second-class citizenry.

This disparity once again became evident during the onset of the pandemic in March 2020. Many immigrants, whom are also "essential workers" exposed themselves daily to a deadly virus in order to keep countless New Yorkers safe. As the 2021 Mayoral elections approach and with over 30 city council seats up for grabs, nearly 1 million of my fellow immigrant New Yorkers will have no voice in this decision. We are a vital and necessary form of NYC's labor force, business economy and tax paying community whose taxes will be paying the salaries of these public officials but have no voice in the political process. This is the Big Apple's version of taxation with no representation.

Immigrants have always been the cornerstone of New York City's culture and commerce yet continue to have their political voices stifled and be denied power at the polls while still contributing financially to the neighborhoods and boroughs they now call home.

The Municipal Voting Rights Bill (Intro 1867), a local law to amend the New York City Charter, allowing lawful permanent residents in New York City to vote in municipal elections, is the first step in eradicating the inequities immigrant communities experience. This iteration of non-citizen voting rights is New York City's chance to address the pervasive marginalization immigrants currently face. This bill would permit Legal Permanent Residents (Green Card Holders) and those with work authorizations to vote in municipal elections.

Even though municipal non-citizen voting currently exists in several municipalities in the U.S – one in California, and 11 in Maryland; the passage of Intro 1867 in New York City is both necessary and revolutionary. This legislation is the catalyst for immigrant suffrage rights in other cities with large immigrant hubs.

RepresentWe was started as a way to create awareness, further discourse on voting rights and highlight the necessity to pass The Municipal Voting Rights Bill. This initiative was both necessary and timely. Legal Permanent Residents like

myself, dutifully pay taxes and can provide monetary support to political campaigns but continue to be denied political power.

Continuous engagement in the democratic process is a revolutionary act. The Municipal Voting Rights Bill (Intro 1867) will arm immigrants with the tools to fully engage in the political process while concurrently on the pathway towards full citizenship and create a holistic and comprehensive voting landscape reflective of New York City's diversity.

Melissa John



Testimony of Pierina Sanchez

Committee on Governmental Operations
Council Member Fernando Cabrera, Chair
Introduction 1867 - Municipal Voting Rights
September 20, 2021

Good morning Chair Cabrera, Council Member Rodriguez and members of the committee. I am Pierina Sanchez, life-long Bronx resident and democratic nominee for New York City Council District 14. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of Introduction 1867, to expand voting rights in New York City elections to nearly one million noncitizen New Yorkers.

Our immigrant neighbors are an essential part of the fabric of this city and should be allowed to vote in municipal elections. They earn their living here, pay taxes here, and send their children to schools here. Half of all frontline workers who kept our city running during the pandemic. They have started half of our small businesses. They invest in and rely on the health and stability of our City and institutions, and thus deserve a say in its stewardship.

And yet, there are over one million residents in NYC who are legally barred from voting in municipal elections because of anti-immigrant policy. Indeed, the exclusion of immigrants is rooted in disenfranchisement as a form of marginalization that have historically worked to exclude communities of color, women and immigrants from participating in U.S. democracy.

Let's be clear - for the first 150 years of US history, noncitizen voting was common. And although NYC allowed noncitizen voting in local school board elections between 1968 and 2003 and other municipalities in the U.S. have adopted noncitizen voting, NYC government today disenfranchise its immigrant residents.

This is particularly important for the our neighborhoods in the West Bronx, where we are 45% foreign born and have some of the highest percentages of noncitizens in NYC. As the child of immigrants from the Dominican Republic, I was heartbroken during recent elections each time I had to break it to a neighbor that, "no," they would not be able to vote in June. For these neighbors, the right to vote would be to treat them with the dignity they deserve.

With voting rights under attack across the US, NYC should be the leader demonstrating we value our immigrants, giving them the right to vote, right here at home. For our noncitizen neighbors, expanding the right to vote would be to live up to the city's promise to be a leader in providing a voice and opportunity to immigrants.

For these reasons I support enfranchising noncitizen immigrants in municipal elections and believe in fully defending all NYC residents' right to vote and urge the City Council to do pass this legislation immediately.

Testimony of [Ron Hayduk](#), Professor of Political Science, San Francisco State University

Thank you for the opportunity to share my research and views about Intro 1867. I hold a Ph.D. in political science from the City University of New York and I am the author of *Democracy for All: Restoring Immigrant Voting in the United States* ([Routledge](#)) and *Gatekeepers to the Franchise: Shaping Election Administration in New York* ([Cornell University Press](#)).

Restoring noncitizen voting is the right thing to do, New York City is the perfect place to do it, and there is no better time than the present. Nor would New York be alone to do so.

[One in three people in New York City are immigrants](#), with almost half of these residents not being U.S. citizens. In many districts the proportion of noncitizens rises to one in three or more. That approximates the political exclusion of women, African- Americans, and youth before laws were changed to incorporate them into the electorate (in 1920, 1965, 1971 respectively). These New Yorkers are counted for districting purposes, pay billions of dollars in taxes and contribute in countless ways to the life of the state and their local cities, but they cannot vote on policies that affect them on a daily basis. What do these conditions mean for such basic democratic principles as “one person, one vote,” “government rests on the consent of the governed,” and “no taxation without representation”? Immigrant political exclusion challenges the ideals of a modern democracy, cutting to the heart of our political practice.

It was wrong to exclude women, people of color, and young people from the vote and it’s wrong to exclude immigrants today. After all, we know what happens when groups are disenfranchised—discrimination, exploitation and marginalization. That’s why African Americans, women and young people fought for their voting rights and that’s why immigrants similarly seek voting rights today. A system where taxpaying residents are disenfranchised is unfair, undemocratic, and un-American.

Allowing immigrants voting rights would restore what was a common and widespread practice in earlier times. [Forty states](#) allowed immigrants to vote during lengthy periods from 1776 to 1926 in local, state and even federal elections. Voting rights in the early American republic were not tied to citizenship, but to whether one was a white, male property holder. Women and African Americans were denied the vote not because they weren’t citizens but because of sexism and racism. [“Alien suffrage,”](#) as it was referred to historically, was used by Congress as an incentive to lure newcomers to settle territories the U.S. acquired by the displacement and genocide of Native Americans, and they retained the practice after becoming states.

Moreover, European noncitizens voted not just in local elections, as [immigrants do today in 11 towns in Maryland and in San Francisco](#), but also in state and even federal elections. And they could hold office. Indeed, many Americans have ancestors that likely voted before they were citizens, whether they are of German, Irish, Polish, Slovakian, Scandinavian, Italian, Jewish, Greek, or Russian heritage. (Of course, most Chinese, Indian, Japanese, Turkish, Mexican and other “people of color” were largely deprived of the vote before the 1960s.)

In practice, noncitizen voting was a logical way to encourage newcomers to build a stake in

America's emerging democracy. And it worked. Immigrant voting and holding office promoted civic education, participation in public affairs, eventual citizenship, and government accountability. Immigrant voting was seen as a pathway to citizenship, not a substitute for it. In short, the idea that noncitizens should have the vote is older, was practiced longer, and is more consistent with democratic ideals than the idea that they should not. "Alien suffrage" is as American as apple pie and is older than our national pastime (baseball). Sadly, this sensible policy became a casualty of waves of anti-immigrant backlash ending in 1926. The Civil Rights Movement swept away poll taxes, literacy tests and other barriers to voting and spurred movements to restore immigrant voting rights, particularly in local elections.

New York City was the first jurisdiction to restore voting to immigrant parents in [NYC's Community School Board Elections from 1969-2002](#), a move that affirmed parent's stake in the education of their children. Noncitizens also held office in those bodies. They did so successfully and to good ends. [Research](#) shows that immigrant parents voted in significant numbers in some districts and helped produce improvements to schools and student outcomes. NYC's 32 Community School Boards had significant powers, such as hiring superintendents and principals and allocating funding for certain programs. During the 1980s, many school districts were characterized by over crowded schools, out of date books, lack of language access or cultural competency, crumbling facilities, no after school programs—all combining to produce poor education for the students, which contributed to and further perpetuated the low socio-economic status of their families. In Washington Heights, a predominantly Dominican section of northern Manhattan, a vibrant voter registration drive in 1986 brought in 10,000 parent voters—most of them immigrants—who turned out in record numbers. This political mobilization led to the election on the local school board of a majority of advocates for immigrants, including the first Dominican ever elected in the U.S., Guillermo Linares, who became the president of the school board. These developments, in turn, contributed to improvements in the schools and helped reshape community politics. (Linares became a City Councilmember, head of the Office of Immigrant Affairs, and is currently a New York State Assemblyman.) As a result of this mobilization the city devoted more funds to improve and build new schools in Washington Heights. In the end, it was not only Dominicans that benefited. All community residents -- including Irish, Italian, Jewish, Puerto Rican and Black families who lived there -- benefited from improved education opportunities. Moreover, it was not just residents in Washington Heights who benefited: similarly, voter mobilization efforts yielded school budgets that grew in other districts in New York City, producing improvements in student and family outcomes. (These patterns were not evident in all 32 school boards.)

Importantly, these examples are isolated to districts in New York City; similar positive results are also evident in other cities where immigrants have voted, such as in Chicago and Maryland. Chicago was the second city to restore NCV in 1988 in local school council elections, which are not as powerful at setting policy, that produced more [modest gains](#) and similar [mixed results](#).

Maryland has the largest number of towns that allow immigrant voting (11) – Takoma Park, Barnesville, Martin's Additions, Somerset, Garrett Park, Chevy Chase, Chevy Chase Section Three, Chevy Chase Section Five, Hyattsville, Glen Echo and Mount Rainer -- in part because the Maryland state constitution allows municipalities to change their electorate without state

approval, unlike most other states. In Takoma Park, the largest town, immigrant engagement has been robust—noncitizens voted at nearly comparable rates as citizen voters in districts where they were concentrated during the 1990s, though their turnout declined after September 11th when anti-immigrant sentiment and surveillance grew, and as federal enforcement grew.

More recently, however, noncitizen voting has increased. For example, in 2021, the elections office in [Hyattsville](#) Maryland devoted significant staff time to voter outreach, education and registration. (They have four full time staff and one part-time staff person for the town's total population of 20,000). They employed use of social media to get the word out, especially paid locally-targeted advertisements in Spanish on Facebook. They also introduced same-day voter registration for local elections and conducted a fully mail-in election – all of which boosted their overall voter turnout by almost 100% from previous local elections.

In 2016, voters in San Francisco approved a ballot initiative that allows any parent the right to vote in School Board Elections, regardless of citizenship and immigration status. More recently, two cities in [Vermont](#) extended voting rights to legal permanent residents. Another dozen cities are considering doing the same, including [Washington D.C.](#), [Chicago](#), [Los Angeles](#), Portland, Maine, and several towns in [Massachusetts](#). [Globally](#), more than forty-five countries on nearly every continent permit voting by immigrants in local, regional or national elections, most adopting noncitizen voting during the last 40 years.

Election Administration: Can immigrant voting be implemented effectively and safely? Yes. Historical and contemporary experience suggests an affirmative answer. Elections officials in other jurisdictions have implemented immigrant voting effectively.

The city clerks in towns in Maryland that allow noncitizens to vote keep two separate voter registration lists: the state keeps a list of citizen voters for state and federal elections and local city clerks keep a separate list of noncitizen voters who can vote in local elections. Election administrators have developed two types of voter registration forms and use them to draw up the two different lists. For local elections—where both citizens and noncitizens vote—the clerks merge the two lists. In this way, the only people who know citizens from noncitizen voters are the election clerks. From the vantage point of an observer, all voters look the same.

After a local election, however, noncitizen voter cards are removed from the voter lists and kept separately. Only citizens will appear on the voter lists for elections of state and federal offices. Towns in Maryland have successfully implemented resident municipal voting for more than two decades without reporting incidents of illegal voting, successfully building a firewall between local elections that occur in different years than in state and federal races.

Election officials in New York had to develop procedures to meet new mandates to accommodate people with disabilities (ADA), language minorities, and new requirements for voter registration and voting (the National Voter Registration Act of 1993, the Help America Vote Act of 2002), and Ranked Choice Voting, suggesting the Board of Elections can do so for a resident voting law today. Such changes are most effectively implemented if done in partnership with voting rights organizations and community groups. Furthermore, there are several concrete and short-term

ways to improve the performance of the NYC Board of Elections, as outlined in the Brennan Center's recent report, "[How to Fix the New York City Board of Elections.](#)"

In [San Francisco](#), community groups, immigration attorneys, elections experts, elected officials, and elections officials worked together to craft a process designed to safeguard vulnerable immigrants and to ensure election integrity, including designing an accessible voter registration form with clear warning language, funding for community organizations to conduct outreach and education, provision of legal services and a public education campaign. [Takoma Park](#) and other towns in Maryland have successfully implemented resident municipal voting for more than two decades without incident, successfully building a firewall between local elections that occur in different years than in state and federal races.

New York City could similarly partner with community groups and literacy experts to craft forms and procedures in ways to minimize problems and maximize participation. Technology is available and in place, including the computerization of voter registration rolls and poll lists, to generate ballots to ensure noncitizens only vote for offices they are eligible to. In addition, broad public information and outreach campaigns would be desirable to help prevent noncitizens from inadvertently registering or voting in a state or federal election, aside from well-crafted administrative processes. In short, experience shows that if there is the political will, there is the technological way.

Invigorate democracy: The political exclusion of noncitizens closes off a proven pathway to political engagement and immigrant incorporation.

No one believes that resident voting is a panacea to the problem of political apathy and low voter turnout; however, it is a critical step toward creating a local governance process that is more inclusive and accessible. Resident voting will not eviscerate the palpable fear and distrust that many immigrant communities have of government. Nevertheless, by implementing a system whereby government officials need to vie for immigrants' support, it will give these vulnerable communities more of an equal footing in the city in which they have a vital stake. Resident voting will not ensure that government is truly accountable to all, but giving immigrants a direct recourse to the ballot box will go a long way toward increasing government responsiveness and accountability. The vote is a tried-and-true mechanism to keep government representative of all the people. Resident voting will help immigrants be more empowered to fight for better public services, just like their citizen neighbors. When immigrants vote, elected officials have greater input from their constituents and therefore a greater mandate. Local government is more accessible and accountable, and ultimately, can produce more effective public policy.

In conclusion, let me quote Jamin Raskin, a law professor and congressperson from Maryland, who as a resident of Takoma Park helped restore immigrant voting there: "immigrant rights are the civil rights" of the day and "by that logic, noncitizen voting is the suffrage movement" of our time. New York City, home of the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island, symbolizes America's past and future as a refuge for immigrants and innovation. How apt it would be to affirm its leadership role by restoring noncitizen voting in city elections. By doing so, it would be making history again.

He decidido tomar la be palabra en esta audiencia para s la importancia de que las personas que tienen green card y permiso de trabajos puedan votar en ellas elecciones de la ciudad y elegir quienes manejan sus lideres ya ellos pagan y son miembros importarte de la sociedad "

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