

Statement of Jessica M. Vaughan

Director of Policy Studies

Center for Immigration Studies, Washington, DC

Re: Home Rule Petition: “AN ACT RELATIVE TO VOTING FOR ALL LEGAL RESIDENTS

IN THE CITY OF BOSTON”

December 5, 2023

The proposal to grant suffrage to “legal immigrants” residing in the city of Boston is an affront to the meaning of citizenship for native-born and naturalized citizens of the city. The right to vote is one of the most precious rewards and responsibilities of citizenship. It should not be casually extended to non-citizens, especially not those who are new arrivals, or those who have no intention of ever pledging allegiance to our republic, or fully embracing Boston as their home. Instead the city should focus on helping legal immigrants become citizens, and welcome their voices when they do.

The city of Boston has no reliable means to ascertain the immigration status of those who would register to vote as non-citizens. Lawful status is something that can be verified by the federal government, but there is no program to do so; the federal status verification programs are available only to social service agencies and employers, and not for the purpose of determining eligibility for voting under a local government standard that may or may not comport with federal standards.

The proposal does not define the terms “legal immigrant” or “legal resident.” Does this mean only those who have been granted Lawful Permanent Residency, or a green card by the federal government? Does it allow those on temporary non-immigrant visas to vote, such as foreign students, temporary guest workers, asylum applicants, exchange visitors, foreign diplomats, or even tourists and international business people who are here for short periods? Would it allow new migrants who crossed the border illegally, or overstayed temporary visas to vote?

The proposals states that only those non-citizens who “intend” to become citizens can register to vote. This is a problematic concept. Many people might “intend” to become citizens, but may not be qualified to do so, either because they are not legal immigrants, not approved for legal residency, or have not gotten around to applying, cannot pass the citizenship test, or even because they are disqualified due to a criminal history.

Supporters of the proposal argue that many non-citizens “pay taxes,” so they should be entitled to vote. This is flawed logic. Will non-citizens be required to show their tax return in order to register? Regardless, “paying taxes” is not currently a pre-requisite for Americans to vote. And, as my colleague Dr. Stanley Renshon addresses this argument in a report ([The Debate Over Non-Citizen Voting: A Primer \(cis.org\)](#)):

That argument assumes that non-citizens get nothing for their taxes, and need the vote to compensate for that. However, the truth is that immigrants from most countries enjoy an immediate rise in their standard of living because of this country’s advanced infrastructure — for example, hospitals, electricity, communications. They also get many services for their taxes —

like public transportation, police, trash collection, and so on. Most importantly and immediately they get what they came for: freedom and opportunity.

For more detailed examination of this argument and other aspects of this issue, see *Allowing Non-Citizens to Vote in the United States: Why Not*, by Dr. Stanley Renshon ([renshon_08.pdf \(cis.org\)](#)).

Non-citizens do not need to vote to have their voices heard in our government. They have ample representation in local, state and federal government. Elected representatives and their staff meet with them and receive correspondence and phone calls to understand their needs and priorities, offer constituent services (including help with resolving immigration application problems), and raise their concerns with their colleagues. Further, there are many private groups in Boston that offer services to non-citizens and advocate for them and their interests in a variety of settings.

City Councilors would be wise to pay attention to the views of their citizen constituents -- who can and do vote -- on this question rather than the wishes of advocates for non-citizens who may or may not have an interest in voting. In a recent poll taken by boston.com, 95 percent of the respondents said that they opposed allowing "legal resident" non-citizens to vote in municipal elections in Boston ([Here's how readers feel about non-citizens voting in local elections \(boston.com\)](#)). While it was a small sample (less than 200 people), still, these lop-sided results should be a warning to the city leaders that many citizens of Boston do not appreciate this effort to dilute their votes.

Respectfully submitted,

Jessica M. Vaughan

Center for Immigration Studies