



City Council in Maryland Votes to Give Vote to Non-U.S. Citizens

With Mayor Patrick Wojahn breaking the council's original 4-4 tie, the city council of College Park, Maryland, on September 12 approved by a 4-3 vote a measure to allow resident non-citizens, presumably including illegal immigrants, to vote in local elections.

College Park is home to the University of Maryland campus, and the charter amendment as passed will allow foreign students attending the university on education visas to vote in city elections, provided they have met College Park's residency requirements for voting.



The vote took place after four hours of debate, during which both sides vigorously defended their position.

One councilman, Fazlul Kabir, who is a naturalized U.S. citizen and University of Maryland instructor, proposed putting the question up for voter consideration in November's election. After his call for a referendum was voted down, Kabir proposed amending the city charter to allow only noncitizens who are permanent residents — informally known as “green card” holders — to register to vote. That amendment was rejected after Wojahn broke the council's 4-4 tie.

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Kabir abstained from the final vote.

The Diamondback, the student newspaper for the University of Maryland, reported that one city resident supporting the change to give noncitizens the vote said opponents were “white supremacists” exhibiting “xenophobia.”

However, Beth Debrowsky, a resident who voted against the change, argued that only citizens should be allowed to vote as it is “constitutional.”

“Although you come up here and you say that there are hundreds of citizens and residents of College Park that are for this charter, I can tell you that there are thousands against it,” she said, according to Fox 5 DC. “Voting is a right of the citizens. It's plain and clear. It's constitutional. It's also written at the state level and it also belongs at the local level.”

Fox 5 DC also quoted a statement from a supporter of the change, Todd Larson, who campaigned for the proposal and is co-director of the Green America group. “The reality is allowing all people to vote in municipal elections is going to make College Park more inclusive, and that has been the history of voting rights expansion in the United States and what has happened in our neighbors in Maryland who have expanded voting rights to non-U.S. citizens,” he maintained.

The Washington Times reported that College Park holds municipal elections in odd-numbered years in November, and they are conducted by city officials separate from county, state, and federal races, for



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on September 14, 2017

which voters must be U.S. citizens. The charter amendment will go into effect in the November 2019 election.

The decision to allow non-citizens (and even those who are in this country illegally) breaks a long-standing principle that with rights come responsibilities. Voting has long been considered a right afforded only to citizens who have accepted all of the responsibilities that come with citizenship, such as serving on juries when summoned.

Image: [Official site of College Park, Maryland](#)

Update: *Three days after the College Park, Maryland, city council voted 4-3 to allow non-citizens to vote, the city issued a news release stating that the vote did not meet the requirements to change the city's charter. On the evening of September 15, the City of College Park said in a news release: "For most Council actions, a simple majority of Council members present must vote in favor of an item for it to be adopted. However, changes to the Charter have a different requirement. The City Charter was amended in June to require the affirmative vote of six elected officials to change the Charter." Fox5 DC News in Washington reported that city officials said they are now notifying residents to inform them that the measure did not pass.*

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