



New York City Council Considers Allowing Non-citizens to Vote

New York City Councilman Daniel Dromm (D-Queens) is leading an effort to draft legislation to let non-citizens vote in New York City's municipal elections. Though the final details have not been worked out and a bill has not yet been introduced in the city council, advance discussion of the legislation reveals that it would provide voting privileges to documented residents who have lived in New York City for at least six months. Such individuals would not be allowed to vote in state or federal elections.



Members of the city council are reportedly discussing the legislation with Mayor Bill de Blasio's office, and a bill might be introduced before summer. The 51-member council currently has 48 Democrats and only three Republicans. De Blasio is a Democrat.

Britain's *Guardian* newspaper, which covered the story more thoroughly than the New York press, quoted Dromm as saying, "Enfranchising non-citizens would make communities like mine more important to city-wide and state officials. We can't ignore them if they can vote."

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Dromm's attempt to have similar legislation passed in 2013 was not successful. In that attempt, he won the support of 35 of the city council's members, forming a veto-proof majority. However, he faced opposition from then-council speaker Christine Quinn — a Democrat — as well as opposition from then-Mayor Michael Bloomberg, who had left the Republican Party to serve as an independent. "[Quinn] and [Bloomberg] didn't want [the legislation] to go forward," Dromm said. "The speaker exerted power over the council's committees."

Advocates of the legislation assert that legal immigrants should have the right to vote.

"New York immigrants contribute around \$18.2 billion in New York state taxes annually, and that's a sizable proportion of people with no representation in the city they invest in," Joanna Cuevas Ingram, an attorney for LatinoJustice and a member of the Coalition to Expand Voting Rights, told ThinkProgress. ThinkProgress is a liberal Washington, D.C.-based political blog founded by John Podesta, who served as chief of staff for President Bill Clinton and counselor to President Barack Obama.

Opponents of the measure argue that the right to vote does not come before citizenship, however. Tom Wroblewski, the political editor of the Staten Island *Advance*, wrote a column on March 23 in which he noted that should the bill become law, it could lead to as many as one million people being given the right to vote and "would be quite a boon for the Democratic Party here."

Staten Island is the only one of the five boroughs of New York City that is predominately Republican, with two of the three Republicans on the city council coming from that borough.



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on April 6, 2015

Wrobleski shot down the arguments that the vote should be extended to legal immigrants who pay their taxes under the mantra, “No taxation without representation and all that.”

He points out that those legal immigrants “get plenty for their money.” They take advantage of city services and infrastructure such as police and fire protection, trash pickup, and “their kids go to public schools and libraries and beaches.”

With the cost of public education, that is no small benefit.

As Wrobleski observes: “They are not being deprived of anything.”

Wrobleski also warns of another danger to giving non-citizens the vote:

You know as well as I do that once legal immigrants are given the vote, supporters will want those who are in this country illegally to have it as well. Let’s just stay off the slippery slope entirely.

Wrobleski cited remarks that former Mayor Bloomberg made when the issue came up during his administration:

[Bloomberg] called voting the most important right an American has, and it should be reserved for citizens who have declared their allegiance to this country.

Legal immigrants may apply for citizenship five years after obtaining legal status. That seems like a reasonable amount of time for a newly arrived resident to learn enough about the American political system to become an informed and intelligent voter. Maybe even enough time to learn that [the United States is a republic, not a democracy](#), something that Councilman Dromm apparently has not learned.

“I believe that in a democracy, everybody should participate, and I don’t see how you call something a democracy when you don’t give everybody that opportunity to participate,” said Dromm said in March.

James Madison, the Father of our Constitution, would have disagreed with Dromm. He once said: “Democracies have ever been spectacles of turbulence and contention; have ever been found incompatible with personal security or the rights of property; and have in general been as short in their lives as they have been violent in their death.” What our Founding Fathers gave us was a Republic.

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