

Let's Strengthen Democracy

Support Noncitizen Voting Rights for Frederick City Residents

"The vote is precious; it is almost sacred. It is the most powerful nonviolent tool we have in a democratic society. And we have to use it."

---Congressman John Lewis

Background

- As early as 1704, noncitizen immigrants were legally allowed to vote. By the end of the 18th century, noncitizens could legally vote in most states. Forty states used to allow noncitizen voting. Increases in immigration as well as nativism led to states retracting alien suffrage.
- Voting rights have always been linked to political power. Limiting access to this right is a way to exclude others. Historically, it has impacted marginalized communities the most.
- Although non-citizens are now prohibited from voting in federal elections, there are fourteen states with no clear impediments to municipalities passing their own voter qualification laws, including Arkansas, California, Colorado, Illinois, Maryland, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, Ohio, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Washington, and Wisconsin.
- In November 2023, the Frederick City Charter Review Commission recommended that non-citizens be granted the right to vote in city elections. If approved by the Board of Aldermen, the city will gain 6,000 new voters.

Reasons to support non-citizen voting in local elections

- Voting rights help to further civil rights as well as social and economic equality.
- Without voting rights, noncitizens are at risk of discrimination and bias because policy makers will not be well acquainted with the needs of this group. No voting rights limits spaces and ways that noncitizens can challenge xenophobia and discrimination in important areas such as employment, housing, education, health care, welfare, and criminal justice.
- Voting is key to having a politically engaged and active community.
- We are stronger as a society when everyone participates.
- Voting extends the visibility and voices of immigrants making the government more representative, responsive, and accountable.
- Voting fosters a sense of belonging.
- Immigrants are our neighbors who pay taxes, attend school, have children who attend school, who go to church or other religious services, who own businesses, own houses, live, work, commune in our community every single day. They should have a say in the way their local government works.



Include ALL RESIDENTS, i.e. do not limit voting to “documented” versus “undocumented” immigrants

- Immigration is not a fixed status. Rather it is one that can continuously change as one becomes eligible for relief. AND applying for citizenship can be a long and expensive process.
- Some immigrants may technically be undocumented but have strong cases that are simply awaiting adjudication. For instance:

- Asylum applicants who have hearing dates several years in the future
- U visa applicants who were victims of egregious crimes but who have to wait 10- 12 years before a U visa is actually available to them
- I-360 for petitions under the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) category are currently taking 3 years to process.

There are some unique classifications where an immigrant might have a work permit but is technically still undocumented, such as the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients. Many immigrants are eligible for relief but do not apply for it because they never find out about the relief and/or they cannot afford an attorney to assist them with a complicated issue.

■ Being an undocumented immigrant should not be equated as not being worthy of societal benefits. Immigration law is a mess that leaves thousands of people who are fleeing violence, persecution, poverty, and environmental disasters without any recourse in this country.

Eleven Maryland Municipalities already allow non-citizen voting

- Barnesville
- Cheverly
- Chevy Chase Section 3 - "without regard to citizenship"
- Garrett Park - "including residents who are not citizens of the United States"
- Glen Echo - "Any person who is not a US citizen"
- Hyattsville - "who are not U.S. citizens"
- Martin's Additions
- Mount Rainier
- Riverdale Park
- Somerset
- Takoma Park – City residents who are "not citizens of the United States" can register to vote in Takoma Park elections, since 1992

Voting Rights in other states, D.C.

- Washington DC – On November 21, 2022, the Council of the District of Columbia passed the *Local Resident Voting Rights Amendment Act of 2022* expanding the definition of a qualified elector to include otherwise eligible non-citizen residents that have lived in D.C. for 30 days
- Montpelier, Winooski, and Burlington in Vermont allow noncitizens to vote in local elections.

School Board Voting

- Oakland, CA - In November 2022, the Noncitizen School Board Voting Measure passed giving noncitizens who are parents, legal guardians, or legally recognized caregivers of a child attending Oakland public school the right to vote for candidates on the Oakland Unified School District Board of Education.

Bibliography:

Democracy for All, Restoring Immigrant Voting Rights in the United States by Ron Hayduk, 2006
https://books.google.com/books?id=AONjUVnyq9wC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false

***Prepared for the RISE Coalition of Western Maryland – on FB
 Resources for Immigrant Support and Empowerment***

by Viviana Westbrook, state and local advocacy attorney with the Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc. Silver Spring, MD

For more information, contact Carol Antoniewicz ecacres@comcast.net, 301-606-9235