

Amanda Garces
Testimony H.207
2/28/2019

Madam Chair and distinguished committee members,

Thank you for allowing me to testify in support of H.207 an act relating to approval of an amendment to the charter change of the City of Montpelier regarding non-citizen voting in City elections

As an immigrant, there is nothing more beautiful than deciding and choosing the community where you are going to live, raise your children (if you decide to raise some) work, and stay put. For many of us, eventually, there is a day when you realize that the place where you live feels like home regardless of the nationality on your passport. It is only because you are creating lasting relationships with your community.

For me, planting roots in this community means that I am committed to supporting the schools that my children attend, as well as supporting local initiatives that enhance the quality of life for ALL Montpelier residents. Our family pays taxes, contribute to the local economy by going to restaurants, shopping locally, and working in town.

I am fortunate to be part of a thriving Latino community in Vermont, we have potlucks, parties, play dates with our children, dance together, relax together and contribute to the Vermont economy together in a variety of ways but we are also part of a bigger community of immigrants who make Montpelier thrive. To give one example, my daughter's class enjoys the richness of five languages, and I can go on and on.

I know community members and friends who are not U.S citizens who have been here for a lot longer than I have, contributing in the same way and involved in local initiatives. Therefore I am urging you to support this charter change and allow non-citizens to vote in our local elections.

As an immigrant rights activist I have been around many people who have championed similar bills in other states and the benefits are beautiful, if only to give our community members a sense of pride and an acknowledgement of their contributions.

The question in people's mind is always, why can't they become citizens? Well, the immigration process is not as simple as people imagine. A variety of reasons can prevent someone from becoming a citizen:

- Not all countries have dual citizenship
- Immigration processes are expensive
- English proficiency is needed if you are under a certain age
- There is a long backlog of citizenship applications now more than 700,000 applicants are waiting patiently to become citizens.
- People have to wait three to five years after you have your permanent resident to become a citizen.
- Some people just don't want to

I know because I know people and family members who fit one or more than one than those challenges.

I have also witnessed how this initiative was built from the ground up in Montpelier and witness the courage of the community members getting signatures to get this in the ballot. Many are my friends and I support them and hope that you do too because they contribute in the same way but without the representation.