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H. 207 - An act relating to approval of an amendment to the charter of the City of Montpelier regarding non-citizen voting in City elections

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Why should non-citizens who are Montpelier residents be allowed to vote in Montpelier affairs?

These are people who live in Montpelier, pay taxes, are involved in local affairs, have a connection to the city and want to be part of making decisions that impact them and their families in their daily lives. They want to feel fully invested in the community and the community wants them to be invested through voting. (This bill passed by $\frac{2}{3}$ in November 2019.)

What are arguments against non-citizen voting and responses to these concerns?

1. Voting is a privilege that should be reserved for citizens.

Some people believe that citizenship and voting are tied together and, for federal elections, they are. However, federal law does not prohibit non-citizens from voting in state or local elections, if states and/or municipalities allow voting. Also, the Vermont Constitution and Vermont case law does not prohibit non-citizens from voting in local elections.

This bill solely addresses voting in Montpelier affairs. The right to vote in federal and state elections will still be limited to U. S. citizens.

2. Why can't people wait until they become citizens?

The answer to this is as complicated as the number of people who would be impacted by the passing of this bill. Here are some examples:

Some people come from countries where dual citizenship is not allowed, they might have family and/or a strong connection to their original country of citizenship and do not want to give up their original citizenship.

Some people would like to become a U.S. citizen, but it is a very lengthy process. It can take up to 10 years or even more to get permanent residency, which is required for the application for citizenship. Then, one has to be a permanent resident for 5 years or, if married to a U.S. citizen, 3 years. In addition, some people cannot afford the fees. (\$725 at this point although the Trump administration has proposed an increase to \$1170. This does not include any potential lawyer's fees.)

3. If this bill is passed so that Montpelier can change its charter, won't all other municipalities want to do the same?

This is a question that cannot be answered. Each municipality will make its own decision. Burlington and Winooski have addressed the question, but have not yet moved forward.

4. Will this bring more immigrants to Montpelier?

This is also a question that cannot be answered. Adoption of this bill into the Montpelier charter would indicate that Montpelier is a city that recognizes the value of all residents' voices. It is hard to say whether non-citizens would choose to live in Montpelier so that they could contribute in this way to decisions for the city.

5. How many people would this impact?

This is difficult to know although the city clerk estimates that it would be less than 24 people.

6. Should one pass a bill that would impact so few people?

By voting for this bill, the voters of Montpelier believe that all residents in Montpelier should have the right to vote in Montpelier affairs. This indicates values of welcoming, equity and inclusiveness.

7. Is non-citizen voting allowed anywhere else in the United States?

Between 1776 and 1926, non-citizen immigrants were allowed to vote in 40 states and some federal elections.

Today, San Francisco and Chicago allow non-citizens to vote in school council elections. 11 municipalities in Maryland allow non-citizen voting in local affairs; Takoma Park, a city of 16,700, has allowed this since 1992 and Chevy Chase started allowing this in 2018.

(Outside of the United States, many countries, including countries in the European Union, Norway, and New Zealand to name a few, allow legal non-citizens to vote in the municipalities within which they live.)

8. How would the ballots be administered?

The city clerk will administer the ballots in a way that non-citizens vote solely for Montpelier issues. The city clerk in Takoma Park MD has been administering this process for 28 years and has not had issues.

9. Would this put non-citizens at risk of committing a crime?

There is nothing in federal law which prohibits non-citizens from voting in local elections. As part of the naturalization process, applicants are asked if they have voted in federal, state or local elections and are asked to provide supplementary materials if they have done so. In this case, the supplementary material would be information from the city of Montpelier.

10. Would non-citizens be allowed to vote on school budgets?

No, as the schools are not included in the Montpelier city budget. Schools are considered a separate municipality.

A final note: Through the petitioning process, I and other people circulating petitions spoke with many Montpelierites, Americans and citizens of other countries, who said that "it just makes sense for those who live in Montpelier to be able to vote here." One

woman talked about her father, now deceased, who lived in Montpelier for many years but remained a British citizen. She said, "My father would have loved to be able to vote in the city he called home."