

Members of the House Education Committee

This note is related to H. 227. While this bill appears to be a comprehensive review of the Winooski City Charter, I suspect that in reality it's focus is more on the eligibility of non-citizens to vote on local issues. Thus, that is the point I would like to address in this note.

First, it is important to point out that Winooski includes two independent municipalities. One is the City of Winooski and the other the Winooski Incorporated School District. Each municipality has its own municipal charter. H. 227 appears to address only the Winooski City Charter. As the two charters are independent from each other and voted on through the years separately, it is clear that one charter is not dominate over the other.

As a resident of Winooski, I oppose the section of this proposed amendment to the Winooski City Charter which would give non-citizens the right to vote on local issues. My reasons are several, including the following:

1. Does the non-citizen eligibility to vote apply only to city issues and not to school district issues? Given two separate charters and this bill amending only the City Charter, this appears to be true?
2. If non-citizens are eligible to vote on local issues in Winooski, does this not establish two different communities in Vermont, one where non-citizens can vote and one where they cannot? One of the reasons the Winooski supporters of this charter change put forth was that non-citizens pay taxes. This is true, but so do second-home owners, should they have the right to vote on local issues?
3. If non-citizens are eligible to vote on local issues in one community, why should they not be eligible to vote in other Vermont communities? Are there other instances where one group of residents are allowed to vote on local issues in one community but not in all Vermont communities?
4. We live in an era of divisive law and application of laws. I see no reason why we should add to that list.
5. The proposed change does not appear to clarify who is eligible for which elected office and who are not. For instance, would non-citizens be eligible for election as school trustees (remember the separate charter) justices of the peace, state representatives and so on?

6. Given that the state legislature and state agencies establish the education property tax, is the vote on the school budget a local issue or a state one?
7. The Winooski supporters of this change suggest that similar legislation is both historical and current in our country. As I have researched several of their references I find many caveats. In some cases non-citizens can only vote on school issues. Others, non-citizens have to be white and landowners. So the comparisons are typically apples to oranges.

I urge the committee to eliminate or otherwise oppose the section of H.227 that would make non-citizens living in Winooski eligible to vote on local issues and officers.

The other amendments to the Winooski City Charter appear to be of the "housekeeping" variety. I would encourage the committee to pass these.

Thank you for your consideration of my comments.

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