

Legal aliens or Boston's new registered voters?

Justin Rice 02.AUG.07

Council looks at voting eligibility rules

Five Boston City Councilors have proposed a Home Rule Petition that would allow immigrants who are already Boston residents, but not yet citizens, to vote in municipal elections.

"I believe this is not happening because the powers that be do not want to represent immigrants," Dorotea Monuela, said after a public hearing before the City Council on Tuesday afternoon.

Monuela, who was representing the Boston May Day Coalition and the Rosa Parks Human Rights Commission, also stressed that immigrants pay taxes whether they're legal or not, and therefore should have the right to vote.

The order — sponsored by Felix Arroyo, Chuck Turner, Charles Yancey, Sam Yoon and Mike Ross — argues that immigrants represent nearly 30 percent of the city's labor force, contribute \$1 billion annually in state and federal taxes, and generate \$12.3 billion of economic activity. They also say that legal immigrants own more than 8,000 businesses in the Greater Boston area.

District 5 City Councilor Rob Consalvo is openly against the idea and made that clear at Tuesday's hearing when he disputed the "no taxation without representation" argument.

"They do get full representation from every elected official," Consalvo said. "They use services, that's why they pay taxes."

Consalvo said that while he respects the order's proponents and their earnestness, the order takes away the incentive to apply for citizenship.

"I believe less people will become citizens," he said. "Obtaining citizenship comes with the right to vote, I think it weakens and cheapens citizenship... It's unfair to people who previously did the right thing. Basically changing the rules midstream is not fair."

Consalvo said that the hearing, during which several people testified that it can take as much as seven to 20 years to obtain citizenship, reinforced his belief that citizenship isn't as accessible as it should be. Nevertheless, he believes the measure speaks to the symptom and not the disease.

"We should hold our federal officials feet to the fire," he said.

Other cities, including Chicago, already have such a measure in place.

But, before Boston's effort moves forward, more on the City Council need to be persuaded.

"We don't know if the council will vote in favor of this," Arroyo said after the hearing. "It will not be implemented until the next election two years from now, if it is approved this year. I will continue to support this every year until we have the vision to do what is right to do."

- [The Bulletin Newspapers](#)