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## ***Our City, Our Vote* Campaign Launches to Expand the Right to Vote in NYC Municipal Elections**

*United Neighborhood Houses, the New York Immigration Coalition, and partners announce support for legislation to expand and protect municipal voting rights*

NEW YORK – January 23, 2020 – A citywide coalition of 45 policy and immigrant rights organizations led by [United Neighborhood Houses](#) (UNH) and the [New York Immigration Coalition](#) (NYIC) announced today during a rally at City Hall the launch of *Our City, Our Vote*, a campaign to expand the right to vote in municipal elections to New York residents who are legal permanent residents or have a work authorization. Currently, nearly [one million](#) New York City residents cannot vote in local elections due to their citizenship status, despite paying taxes and being invested in and contributing to the city.

“New York City leads the country in promoting the inclusion and empowerment of immigrants, but too many New Yorkers still don’t have a say in the officials that represent them and the policies that impact their families and communities,” said **Susan Stamler, executive director of UNH**. “Settlement houses know firsthand that ensuring neighborhoods are politically engaged results in better public policies that make our city stronger. We are proud to be a part of this campaign and call on the City Council to pass this legislation.”

Introduced by Council Members Ydanis Rodriguez, Carlos Menchaca, Daniel Dromm, Margaret S. Chin, I. Daneek Miller, Fernando Cabrera, with support from 20 other Council Members and Public Advocate Jumaane Williams, this legislation would allow these New Yorkers to participate in municipal elections for local officials, such as City Council Members, Mayor, Public Advocate, and Comptroller, as well as ballot initiatives. Individuals must have been a resident of New York City for at least 30 days and otherwise must qualify to register and vote under New York State election law. The legislation also includes key safeguards such as robust community education, training for poll workers and agency staff who may be handing out voter registration forms, and the ability of a voter to opt out of registering if they did so by mistake.

“We live in a moment when reactionary forces are throwing up barriers to the right to vote, and the President lies about voter fraud,” said **Steve Choi, Executive Director of the New York Immigration Coalition**. “Yet nearly one million New Yorkers are denied the right to vote. They legally live here, work

here, go to school here, and are raising families here. Yet, despite paying billions of dollars in taxes, they have no say in the direction of our city. The Our City, Our Vote bill presents an opportunity to right that wrong to create a more inclusive 21st century democracy that works for every New Yorker. In New York City, the quintessential city of immigrants, democracy should be inclusive and reflective of the people who call it home."

In New York, residents were able to vote in school board elections, regardless of their citizenship status, from 1968 until the abolishment of community school boards in 2003. In many City Council districts, residents can still vote in local Participatory Budgeting regardless of their status.

"Today, we stand alongside immigrants of all backgrounds, languages and religions, to fight for their right to participate in our democratic system," said **NYC Council Member Ydanis Rodriguez (D-Washington Heights, Inwood, Marble Hill Washington Heights, Inwood, Marble Hill), Co-chair of the Black, Latino, and Asian Caucus**. "For too long, Green Card holders and New Yorkers with working permits have been unable to elect their local representatives. New York City has the opportunity to show the nation that we value the contributions and the hard work immigrants bring to our City. The bill is currently supported by the New York Immigration Coalition, the New York State NAACP, BLAC caucus, the Progressive Caucus, and more than 40 organizations. I am proud to also have the support of Immigration Committee Chairman Carlos Menchaca, Council Members Daniel Dromm, Cabrera, Chin, the New York City Public Advocate and more than 20 additional Council Members. This bill would enfranchise close to 1 million voters who would become eligible to vote for their local representatives. We cannot call ourselves a progressive City while denying a large swath of our constituency the right to participate in municipal elections."

"If you live and work in New York City, you deserve a say in shaping our City's future," said **NYC Council Member Carlos Menchaca (D-Red Hook, Sunset Park, Greenwood Heights and portions of Windsor Terrace, Dyker Heights, and Boro Park), Chair of the Committee on Immigration**. "Yet every year, despite the fact that thousands of immigrant New Yorkers already participate in the political process – from Participatory Budgeting, to poll site interpretation, to volunteering on the very campaigns that elect our city's officials – they cannot vote. Today, we say basta to this hypocrisy. It is time for more of our neighbors to have the franchise to vote their voice and elect more people like them. This is the beginning of a discussion of how we can live up to our vision of being a city for all New Yorkers."

"Everyone who pays taxes should be able to vote," said **NYC Council Member Daniel Dromm (D-Jackson Heights, Elmhurst)**. "'No taxation without representation' is a principal our country was founded on. It is a basic civil right. As an elected official representing one of the most immigrant-rich districts in the nation, I am pleased to support this legislation that will restore that right to New Yorkers with green cards or worker permits."

"Today, I'm proud to join my fellow New Yorkers to definitively say, 'No taxation without representation,'" said **NYC Council Member Margaret S. Chin (D-Battery Park City, Civic Center, Chinatown, Financial District, Little Italy, the Lower East Side, NoHo, SoHo, South Street Seaport, South Village, TriBeCa & Washington Square)**. "Throughout my life as a first generation American, I have seen first-hand exactly how barriers to political participation can marginalize immigrant communities – it strips you of your power, your access to services, and your visibility in our local democracy. That is why I fought so hard, even before taking office, to expand language access to the ballot. In order to deliver on its promise to being a haven for all – regardless of their citizenship status –

our City must give more New Yorkers the opportunity to make their voices heard in the electoral process.”

“We are a city of immigrants whose contributions to our city’s economy, workforce, and cultural identity are undeniable and yet they cannot exercise the right to vote,” said **NYC Council Member Farah Louis (D-Flatbush, East Flatbush, Midwood, Marine Park, Flatlands, Kensington)**. “I am proud to co-sponsor legislation that would create an opportunity for thousands of lawful permanent residents to participate in municipal elections and elect their own representatives. With all of the anti-immigrant rhetoric in our nation’s capital and our democracy at stake, now is the time to engage, empower, and mobilize immigrants to weigh in on policies and initiatives that will affect their way of life. Thank you Council Member Ydanis Rodriguez for your leadership in this effort to bridge the gap, ensuring that every voice is heard.”

“Every citizen of New York should be able to vote,” said **NYC Council Member Andrew Cohen (D-Bedford Park, Kingsbridge, Riverdale, Norwood, Van Cortlandt Village, Wakefield, Woodlawn)**. “Everyone living and working here is entitled to a say in how their government is run and representation in the conversations that determine how their tax dollars are spent and the laws they’re required to live by. Representation in our political process is a non-negotiable right for all New Yorkers.”

“At the local level especially, public policy should be informed by the whole community. New Yorkers with green cards and worker permits use all of the same municipal services as native citizens, and they should have a say in how those services serve the communities they call home,” said **NYC Council Member Robert E. Cornegy, Jr. (D-Bedford Stuyvesant, Northern Crown Heights)**. “I am proud to support Council Member Rodriguez in his effort to expand the ability to participate in our great democracy, making it more vibrant and inclusive.”

“Immigrant New Yorkers are an integral part of New York City, contributing a diversity of ideas, foods, languages, art, economic activity, and taxes that make our city such a vibrant place,” said **NYC Council Member Brad Lander (D-Cobble Hill, Carroll Gardens, Columbia Waterfront, Gowanus, Park Slope, Windsor Terrace, Borough Park, Kensington)**. “Communities that give so much to our city should have the same right as other New Yorkers to participate in the democratic process and have a voice in electing those who make decisions that affect all of our lives.”

“Given the current climate of our country it is important that we not only talk about being an inclusive city but we must also show that we are,” said **NYC Council Member Adrienne Adams (D-Jamaica, Richmond Hill, Rochdale Village, South Ozone Park)**. “The people who live in New York City should have a say in local government and expanding voting rights of noncitizens will make our democracy stronger. I thank Council Member Rodriguez for leading this important legislation and I look forward to its passage”

“This legislation will allow hard-working immigrants to take part in our electoral process in New York City,” said **NYC Council Member Mathieu Eugene (D-Crown Heights, East Flatbush, Flatbush, Kensington, Midwood, Prospect Park, and Prospect Lefferts Gardens)**. “Passage of this legislation will best ensure that the representatives who are elected to municipal government embody the rich diversity of communities that make immense contributions and are the foundation of the economy of our City .”

“Voting is the cornerstone of our democracy. As the Council Member who represents the United Nations and individuals from all over the world, I support legislation that extends the right to participate in our

democratic process,” said **NYC Council Member Keith Powers (D-Upper East Side, Carnegie Hill, Yorkville, Central Park South, Midtown East, Times Square, Koreatown, Stuyvesant Town and Peter Cooper Village, Waterside Plaza, Tudor City, Turtle Bay, Murray Hill, Sutton Place)**. “Thank you to Council Member Rodriguez and colleagues for this legislation.”

“Hundreds of thousands of immigrant New Yorkers already pay taxes and contribute to our city’s great economic growth,” **NY State Senator Jessica Ramos (D-East Elmhurst, Corona and Jackson Heights)**. “The right thing to do is to give them the opportunity to vote in our local elections. I commend council member Ydanis Rodriguez, our colleagues and the dozens of organizations advocating for the Municipal Voting Rights bill. I look forward to seeing it get done!”

"Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs) are New York City’s fastest growing racial group and make up more than 15% of the city’s population. The AAPI community is also an economic driver and contributes over \$6 billion to state and city tax revenues. However, New York City’s “AAPI community is woefully underrepresented in elected office and in budget and legislative decisions,” said **Amy Torres, Director of Policy & Advocacy at the Chinese-American Planning Council (CPC)**. “Historically, non-citizens participated in America’s elections until waves of anti-immigrant sentiment at the turn of the 20th century restricted their vote. Expanding voting rights to permanent residents and work permit holders with the Our City, Our Vote bill not only makes good on the promise that New York City is a city of immigrants, but it also holds decision-makers accountable to the over one million New Yorkers who contribute to our city’s vibrancy, resiliency, and tax-base.”

“We have to acknowledge that nearly a million New Yorkers cannot vote today in their local elections and choose their elected officials, including thousands of street vendors, while they reside and work lawfully in our city, pay taxes and contribute to the economy,” said **Mohamed Attia, Executive Director of the Street Vendor Project**. “They should be given the right to vote to make sure New York City is inclusive to all New Yorkers.”

“The Asian Pacific American community in New York City is heavily immigrant with almost 80% of the population being foreign-born. They are taxpayers and contributors to our vibrant and diverse City. Contrary to the model minority myth, APA communities continue to face challenges in areas such as health and economic security, yet are often excluded from decision-making processes,” say **Anita Gundanna and Vanessa Leung, Co-Executive Directors of the Coalition for Asian American Children and Families**. “Expanding local election voting rights to green card holders and those authorized to work in the U.S. will ensure that more communities, including APAs, are better represented in government. We stand with the Our City, Our Vote coalition in demanding a more inclusive democracy that empowers immigrants to make their voices heard and to hold the City accountable to their needs.”

“The Nepali Speaking Community, an emerging minority bloc and fast growing electoral bloc, have about 50,000 residents in New York City. But if we breakdown the number of eligible voters, only 5 percent of our total population are eligible to vote in local elections,” says **Shailesh Shrestha, Host and Producer, Sampreshan Inc.** “If we pass this legislation to expand voting rights, the majority of our population would be eligible to participate in the democratic process. Democracy should be all about the peoples’ participation not hypothetical political rhetoric and doctrine. On behalf of our Nepali speaking community and affiliated organizations, I urge the City Council to build on this momentum to pass this progressive legislation!”

“Expanding the right to vote in New York City elections to those who pay taxes and live in New York City, is the right thing to do. 55% of foreign born Chinese New Yorkers are already American citizens and have the right to vote in all elections. But many more will become citizens in the future. Let's let them become civically engaged now by allowing their participation in local elections,” said **Mae Lee, Executive Director of the Chinese Progressive Association**.

"Well over a million New Yorkers live in households that include both citizens and noncitizens, and through *Our City, Our Vote*, we can make it possible for all immigrants with work authorization to have a voice in Citywide elections," said **John Park, Executive Director, MinKwon Center for Community Action**. "Noncitizen voting was common in the early history of the United States until the first half of the 19th Century, and it is still up to local governments to decide how local elections are held. In fact, several municipalities in Maryland currently allow noncitizen voting. Immigrants pay their fair share of taxes, but often without a voice in representation, and it is time to exercise our rights as New Yorkers to change that."

Thus far, 45 organizations have signed on in support of the campaign, including Adhikaar, African Communities Together, American Pakistani Advocacy Group, Arab American Association of NY, Arab American Family Support Center, Asian American Legal Defense & Education Fund, CAAAV, CHHAYA CDC, Chinese Progressive Association, Chinese-American Planning Council, Cidado Global, Coalition for Asian American Children & Families, Community Voices Heard, Demos, Desis Rising Up and Moving, DSI International Inc, East Side House Settlement, Educational Alliance, Faith in New York, Federation of Indigenous Peoples' of Nepal in America, Goddard Riverside Community Center, Grand Street Settlement, Inc., Hispanic Federation, Human Services Council, Indo-Caribbean Alliance, Inc., Jacob A. Riis Neighborhood Settlement, Latino Justice PRLDEF, Literacy Assistance Center, Masa, Minkwon Center for Community Action, NAACP New York Conference, New York Immigration Coalition, Nonprofit New York, Queens Community House, Restaurant Opportunities Center of New York, S.T.O.P., Sampreshan TV Show, Shetu Inc., Street Vendor Project, South Asians for America, Sunnyside Community Services, The Black Institute, Unite Here Local 100, United Neighborhood Houses, United Sherpa Association, and VOCAL New York.

For more information on municipal voting rights, [click here](#). To join *Our City, Our Vote*, please sign up [here](#) or share your support on Twitter with the hashtag #OurCityOurVote.

### **About United Neighborhood Houses**

United Neighborhood Houses (UNH) is a policy and social change organization representing 43 neighborhood settlement houses that reach 765,000 New Yorkers from all walks of life. A progressive leader for more than 100 years, UNH is stewarding a new era for New York's settlement house movement. We mobilize our members and their communities to advocate for good public policies and promote strong organizations and practices that keep neighborhoods resilient and thriving for all New Yorkers. UNH leads advocacy and partners with our members on a broad range of issues including civic and community engagement, neighborhood affordability, healthy aging, early childhood education, adult literacy, and youth development. We also provide customized professional development and peer learning to build the skills and leadership capabilities of settlement house staff at all levels. For more information, visit <http://www.unhny.org/>.

### **About the New York Immigration Coalition**

[The New York Immigration Coalition \(NYIC\)](#) is an umbrella policy and advocacy organization for more than 200 groups in New York State. We envision a New York state that is stronger because all people are welcome, treated fairly, and given the chance to pursue their dreams. Our mission is to unite immigrants, members, & allies so all New Yorkers can thrive. We represent the collective interests of New York's diverse immigrant communities and organizations and devise solutions to advance them; advocate for laws, policies, and programs that lead to justice and opportunity for all immigrant groups; and build the power of immigrants and the organizations that serve them to ensure their sustainability, to improve people's lives, and to strengthen our state.

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