

Good Evening. My name is Kica Matos. I live at 89 East Pearl St. I am a resident of the city of New Haven and have lived here for the last 21 years. I serve as the President of the National Immigration Law Center, better known as NILC. NILC works to defend and advance the rights and opportunities of low-income immigrants through litigation, policy advocacy, and narrative and culture change.

I am here this evening to strongly encourage the Committee of the Whole of the Board of ALDERS to recommend a charter revision so that New Haven residents who are not electors can serve on Boards and Commissions.

The charter's exclusion of immigrants, refugees and non-citizens from participating in Boards and Commissions is inconsistent with our status as a sanctuary city. All of our city residents should be able to serve - it would both benefit our city and strengthen our democracy.

As we know immigrants, refugees and other non-US citizens are our neighbors and our co-workers. They pay taxes and make other economic contributions to this city. New Haven is the place that they call home, and it is here where they have chosen to grow roots and raise their families. The vibrancy of this city has been boosted in part by these communities. Yet we reject the expertise and knowledge that they could potentially bring to City Boards and Commissions. So today, while they are directly impacted by the decisions these bodies make, they are denied the opportunity to have a voice and to serve, despite a willingness to do so.

Other jurisdictions around the country have paved the way and strengthened their own democracies by moving in this direction. In 2019, California enacted SB 714, which allows non-citizens to be appointed or elected to serve on county central

committees. One year later, San Francisco became the first major city to allow non-citizens to serve on commissions and advisory boards and Hayward, CA passed a similar ballot measure. In 2021, Santa Ana approved a law allowing non-citizens to serve on boards. Last November, Chula Vista CA voters approved a ballot initiative allowing immigrants to serve on local commissions. And in Boulder CO, the only requirements to serve on city boards and committees is that you be a city resident and 18 or older. Other jurisdictions have gone a step further on the civic engagement front by allowing noncitizens to vote in local elections. (Vermont and Maryland. NY and CA also but this is being disputed)

Let me wrap up by sharing a reflection. New Haven was once considered to be one of the nation's most progressive cities when it came to immigration issues. We pioneered city identification cards and were the second city in the nation whose police force declined to ask residents about their immigration status. During the Trump years, our efforts to offer sanctuary to those facing deportation were notable and lauded. Sadly, today, we are no longer seen as that beacon of light. Tonight, I encourage the leadership of this city to put us back on the map. Let us ensure that New Haven's "sanctuary city" includes giving all residents an equal opportunity to have their voices heard and to participate in our democracy.