



Testimony before the New York City Council Committee on
Governmental Operations
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Women Creating Change is an inclusive community that partners with organizations and with New York City women who have been systemically excluded from civic processes to develop programs and influence policies that result in more equitable civic engagement.

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My name is Lea Giddins and I am the Senior Program and Policy Manager at [Women Creating Change](#), a nonprofit that increases civic engagement awareness and opportunities for women who have been systemically excluded from civic processes. Thank you to Chair Cabrera and members of the New York City Council Committee on Governmental Operations for the opportunity to submit testimony.

I am testifying today in support of [Int.1867](#) to expand voting rights to nearly one million New Yorkers with work authorizations, and green cards.

At Women Creating Change, we have been advocating for voting rights and civic engagement for more than 100 years. We recently launched our new signature initiative, Civic Matters, an innovative program that disrupts systemic barriers to civic engagement for women and creates opportunities for learning and more equitable civic participation.

Just last year, we celebrated the centennial of the ratification of the 19th Amendment. Although it was the single [greatest expansion of voting rights](#) in U.S. history, it failed to enfranchise women of color, who were forced to wait until the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 to gain the right to vote.

Having been directly involved in the women's suffrage movement, WCC is proud to raise our voices once again to expand democracy as part of the [Our City, Our Vote Coalition](#), led by our incredible partners the [New York Immigration Coalition](#) and [United Neighborhood Houses](#), community members, and other coalition partners. The legislation is a natural extension of WCC's early work to secure women's suffrage.

Immigrants have always been vital to our city. Never has that been more true than during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Half of all frontline, essential workers are immigrants, and one in five are noncitizens. They make up:

- [53% of grocery and pharmacy workers \(27% noncitizens\)](#)
- [53% of healthcare workers \(16% noncitizens\)](#)
- [70% of building cleaning workers \(36% noncitizens\)](#)

New York City cannot have a fair and just COVID-19 recovery plan if the New Yorkers who are most impacted by the pandemic cannot vote for the people who will make the recovery decisions. We owe it to frontline heroes to finally include their voices and their votes as our city moves forward.

Noncitizen voting is not without historical precedent and in many ways, Intro. 1867 would be a re-enfranchisement of voting rights. Prior to World War I, [immigrants could vote in local, state and congressional races throughout the country](#) (even though Black Americans and women could not). There are already successful immigrant municipal voting programs in [San Francisco, Takoma Park, Maryland, and more than 45 countries](#).

Now is the time to rethink what a 21st-century democracy looks like. In New York City, the quintessential city of immigrants, democracy should be inclusive of and accountable to everyone who calls it home.

On a personal note, I was born and raised in New York City and have lived here most of my life. I want all of my neighbors to have the right to participate in this core civic process. Passing Int. 1867 is the right thing to do and would make me even prouder to be a lifelong New Yorker.

New York City should be encouraging greater civic engagement and mobilizing our communities to advocate for good public policies that invest in and enhance our city. Expanding the right to vote in city elections provides more New Yorkers the opportunity to have a say on issues that affect them, and will strengthen the voices of all our communities.

We know that local contests are often just as consequential as federal or state-level elections. It is past time we afforded all New Yorkers the right to have a say in how their neighborhoods are governed. New York City has an opportunity to stand firm in its commitment to our immigrant neighbors.

Thank you to the more than 33 City Council members who already support this bill. I urge the City Council to immediately put this bill to a vote to realize a more just and equitable democracy. WCC looks forward to partnering with the City Council to create the fully enfranchised, just, and representative city that we know is possible.