

**Testimony of José Davila,
Vice President of Policy & Governmental Relations for the Hispanic Federation,
Before the NYC Council Immigration and Governmental Affairs Committees
Regarding Intro. 410: Immigrant Municipal Voting Rights**

May 9, 2013

Good afternoon. My name is José Davila and I am the Vice President of Policy and Governmental Relations for the Hispanic Federation. I would like to thank Chairs Daniel Dromm and Gale Brewer and members of the Committees on Immigration and Governmental Affairs for inviting us to testify in support of Intro. 410, to allow lawfully present immigrants residing in New York City to vote in municipal elections.

The Hispanic Federation supports this bill and calls on the New York City Council to pass Intro. 410 to ensure our non-naturalized immigrant residents, neighbors, parents and workers are able to play a meaningful role in who represents their interests in City Hall.

As you may know, the Hispanic Federation is one of the leading Latino organizations in the nation and is dedicated to promoting the social, political and economic well being of the Hispanic community. Since 2007, the Federation has supported the expansion of voter rights to lawful immigrants in New York City.

New York City's elected officials are chosen by the people, for the people. Yet more than 1.3 million New Yorkers who financially, socially and culturally contribute to New York City's thriving society are unable to vote in city elections due to their lack of U.S. citizenship. Although these hard working immigrants fuel our economy, with a contribution of \$229 billion in economic output in New York State, they are unable to vote for elected officials who make decisions that have a direct impact on their life. In fact, 48% of business owners in NYC are immigrants. Immigrants own 62% of construction and 40% of engineering companies, 84% of small grocery stores, 69% of restaurants and 63% of clothing stores. These business owners generate revenue for their communities and provide residents with essential needs, yet those who lack U.S. citizenship do not have the ability to choose those who represent them on the city level.

The municipal officers of New York City make decisions that affect the everyday life of all New Yorkers. They decide educational policies that directly influence the schooling and futures of NYC's children, healthcare policies that affect families, legislation that affects affordable housing and so much more. It is proven that communities that vote in high numbers have better resources. Our immigrant communities deserve a chance at fair representation in New York City's legislature and a voice in their futures.

Voting is the most effective way to voice concerns and aspirations regarding the actions taken by those in public office. It is the best way to hold those in office accountable for their actions. Expanding the right to vote in municipal elections would give 1.3 million lawfully present residents of New York City a say in who makes the decisions that directly affect the best interest of their families, businesses, happiness and overall quality of life.

New York City is a unique example of a melting pot of immigrants from all over the world. We honor our history and the contributions immigrants have made to our quality of life. Expanding our electorate and allowing more people to participate in the political process is the most effective way to protect the rights of New York City's residents.