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THE COUNCIL OF
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

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Testimony of New York City Council Member Daniel Dromm

I am the New York City Council Member representing the 25th District, which includes Jackson Heights, Elmhurst, Corona, LeFrak City, Woodside, and Rego Park. I also serve as Chair of the Committee on Immigration.

My district's population is estimated to be 68% foreign-born, one of the highest figures in the city. Unfortunately, it also has one of the lowest levels of voter participation.

In immigrant-rich New York City, one in five residents cannot vote. Many have not yet completed the long and arduous process to citizenship although they will eventually become eligible. Many others are in different legal statuses or without documentation.

These residents are often eager to become involved in the democratic process, yet their voices are severely limited by the fact they cannot vote for the local officials who make the decisions that most directly impact their daily lives.

This problem faced by my constituents, and many taxpayers across the city, prompted me to introduce a bill to allow immigrants here lawfully to vote in municipal elections. Introduction 410 would expand democracy and civic participation in a way that will make this city a better place for everyone.

The goals of Introduction 410 very much fit with the mission of the Campaign Finance Board's Voter Assistance Unit to promote voter registration, voting, and civic engagement through community outreach and partnerships with public and private organizations. If enacted, Introduction 410 could benefit greatly from the CFB's voter outreach and education efforts.

With the potential enfranchisement of a large segment of the city's population, the CFB's efforts will become especially critical to reaching and educating new municipal voters. I encourage the CFB to strengthen its efforts in the following areas:

*Regardless of when non-citizen voting is enacted, language access has been a critical part of voter outreach. One important measure is translating voter outreach materials into languages besides the ones in which voter registration forms are printed.

*The CFB should work with community-based organizations that serve our city's immigrants. Many of these organizations have already been involved in issues of immigrant civic participation.

*Announcements should be published and broadcast in media outlets that have large immigrant audiences.

*Outreach should be tailored to the way immigrants actually receive information.

*Emerging communities, that is, relatively small but rapidly growing groups, should be included in voter outreach efforts.

*The NYC Votes Street Team needs to reach even more primarily immigrant neighborhoods.

*The *Your Vote Counts* program, which focuses on women voters, should include special efforts to engage immigrant women, with the linguistic and cultural capacity to reach these communities.

*The 1,000 Voter Registration Drive Challenge should reach the places where immigrants congregate.

*While several CFB initiatives do reach certain immigrants, an initiative dedicated to immigrants is needed.

*The CFB should continue to strengthen its work with city agencies. The Commission on Human Rights has made voter materials available at citizenship oath ceremonies and should increase such efforts. The Department of Education helps distribute registration forms to graduating seniors, but parent outreach is also important. The CFB should engage the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs in reaching voters.

*As the CFB has done with the hip hop community, there should be outreach at Latino, African, Asian, European, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender cultural events.

By strengthening efforts around immigrant U.S. citizen voters now, the CFB will be prepared for reforms that enfranchise non-citizen voters. Introduction 410 represents the potential to reinvigorate our local democracy, and I hope the CFB will play a vital role in realizing the lofty goals of this legislation. Thank you.