

11 Massachusetts Democrats sponsor bill to allow non-citizens to vote in local elections

A bill sponsored by eleven Massachusetts Democrats to allow non-U.S. citizens to vote in local elections continues to move forward by legislators in Boston. The bill introduced in the Massachusetts House was referred to the Joint Committee on Election Laws on January 23 of this year. The Massachusetts Senate concurred on the same day and there have been joint hearings on the bill in June and October of this year.

The following legislators sponsored the bill:

Rep. Byron Rushing [D]
Rep. Denise Provost [D]
Rep. David Rogers [D]
Rep. Daniel Donahue [D]
Rep. Marjorie Decker [D]
Rep. Jose Tosado [D]
Rep. Michelle Dubois [D]
Rep. Kay Khan [D]
Sen. James Eldridge [D]
Rep. Carlos Gonzalez [D]
Rep. Elizabeth Malia [D]

The key part of the bill:

“Notwithstanding the provisions of section one of chapter fifty-one of the general laws or any other general or special law to the contrary, non-citizens, 18 years of age or older, residing in a city or town that accepts section 1G, inclusive, may upon application have their names entered on a list of voters established by the municipal election officials, and

may thereafter vote in any municipal election for school committee, school committee questions, city council and board of selectmen for so long as they remain domiciled in the municipality.”

Full text of the bill:

Massachusetts-2017-H388-Introduced

Absentee ballots now available for New Bedford Municipal Election

The City of New Bedford Municipal Election will be held on Tuesday, November 7, 2017, and the New Bedford Elections Commission has announced that absentee ballots for this election are now available through the Elections Office at New Bedford City Hall.

Any registered voter unable to get to the polls on Election Day may vote by absentee ballot during regular office hours or may request that an absentee ballot application be mailed to their home address. Parents or family members can apply for an absentee ballot on behalf of their children attending out-of-city colleges and universities.

Absentee ballots may be requested up until 12 noon on Monday, November 6. These ballots must be returned to the Election Office by 7:30 p.m. on Election Day, Tuesday, November 7.

In addition, to allow voters more time to cast an absentee ballot, the City of New Bedford Election Office will open on Saturday, November 4, 2017 from 8 a.m. to 12 noon.

In the municipal election on Tuesday, November 7, 2017, New Bedford voters may cast their vote for Mayor, Assessor, School Committee, Councillors-At-Large, and Ward Councillors.

Any city resident who is uncertain about their voting status, designated polling location, has changed their address since the last election or wishes to request an absentee ballot, should contact the Board of Election Commissioners at (508) 979-1420.

New Bedford City Council candidates top priority

New Bedford at-Large City Council candidates were asked for their top priority. Who had the best answers?

Full forum video:
<https://www.newbedfordguide.com/new-bedford-city-council-at-large-candidate-forum/2017/10/13>

New Bedford City Council candidates address cleanliness of the city

New Bedford at-Large City Council candidates were asked how they would keep the city clean and welcoming for residents and tourists. Who had the best answers?

Full forum video:
<https://www.newbedfordguide.com/new-bedford-city-council-at-large-candidate-forum/2017/10/13>

New Bedford City Council candidates address homelessness

New Bedford at-Large City Council candidates were asked how they would deal with the perceived increase in homelessness in New Bedford. Who had the best answers?

Full forum video:
<https://www.newbedfordguide.com/new-bedford-city-council-at-large-candidate-forum/2017/10/13>

A vote for a 4-year New Bedford mayor term is a vote for less democracy

In August of 2014, New Bedford Mayor John Mitchell voiced his support for moving terms for New Bedford mayor from two years to four. The goal was to get the City Council to make the change.

"I believe that the adoption of a four-year term is necessary

because the current two-year term impedes our ability to build the better future we all want for our City, in that it (1) tends to undermine the general effectiveness of the executive branch; (2) skews policy and program initiatives toward narrow or trivial short term interests; (3) diverts time and energy to mobilizing campaign organizations and to campaign fundraising and away from important governmental duties; and puts New Bedford at a competitive disadvantage versus cities with more modern mayoral structures.”

The City Council didn’t act and more than three years later a citizen’s group called **New Bedford Fourward** has gathered enough signatures to put the 4-year mayoral term on the November 7th ballot. SouthCoast Chamber President & CEO Rick Kidder voiced his support behind the move.

While current New Bedford mayor Jon Mitchell stated three years ago that he would not be included in a 4-year term, the official ballot question doesn’t exempt him from a future 4-year term.

I’ve yet to see a valid point to have less democracy from the 4-year term supporters. **Former New Bedford Mayor Scott Lang articulated recently** why he doesn’t support 4-year terms and should be watched by everyone considering it.

Scott Lang’s main points are that New Bedford residents are being asked to give up your right to vote every two years, running for office shouldn’t be considered an inconvenience and 4-year terms would continue to decrease an already low voter turn out in New Bedford. Finally, he suggest if you don’t see your elected officials enough with 2-year terms, how often do you think you’ll see them with 4-year terms?

I tend to agree with all Lang’s points. Let’s review some **the points from the folks pushing for a 4-year term based on the press release they sent out.**

"Dr. John Fletcher, a former principal and member of the New Bedford School Committee, said he supports the change to four years because there is a "learning curve, especially in the beginning" when a new mayor takes office.

"Fortunately, (as a school committee member) I had the advantage of a four-year term to ease into my responsibilities and hit my stride," Fletcher said. "That same comfort zone in the mayoral term would allow for growth into a challenging job."

Really? It takes four years to get a bachelors degree from a university, but it doesn't take four years to understand what a mayor does. You either vote for the candidate with experience (the incumbent) based on his or her experience or you vote for the opponent saying they can do a better job. In most cases, you are voting for the leadership skill. We have department heads for the expertise in city government.

Also, do we really want new mayors of New Bedford to be comfortable? Personally, I want my leaders to feel like they are always working for me. We have comfortable politicians in Washington D.C. and on Boston, we don't need more of that.

"The mayor, as the CEO of the city, should be allowed to get to know what makes the city tick without an election hanging over his or her head in year one."

I don't understand this point because the mayor's term is two years, not one. When you are elected to mayor in New Bedford you have about 22 months before worrying about re-election. You win in November and your next election is in October, 23 months later. Most of the recent incumbent mayors didn't start campaigning until September, 22 months after being elected. That means mayors don't have to worry about re-election in the first year of being elected, they worry at the end of their second year.

Let's face it, there is a reason incumbents win 67% of the

time – they hold press conferences and send out press releases during their 48 months in office and have name recognition. They already have a significant advantage and it takes a lot to knock out incumbents, so there is no reason to state 2-year terms become a disadvantage because of learning curves, especially for incumbents that have already been re-elected to multiple terms.

“Victor Pinheiro, owner of Luzo Auto Center, served three terms on the New Bedford City Council.

“I witnessed firsthand the shortcomings of a two-year mayoral term, where sound governance can take a back seat to political expediency in the heat of an always near election,” he said.

“A four-year term allows the city’s mayor to make decisions and implement strategies focused more on the long-term results rather than the electoral pressures of the next and always-near election. Taking this to the voters is the best way to gauge their wishes, it will truly give the voters a voice in this important decision.”

Is two years really a short amount of time? Do mayors stop focusing on the long-term success of a city with 2-year terms? Is it a bad thing to be held accountable every two years? I find it hard to answer yes to any of these questions.

Christian Farland, president of Farland Corp. is a lifelong resident of the city. He said he also supports the change.

“One of the advantages of going to a four-year term will be the positive message it will send to those who invest and who want to invest in the City of New Bedford.

A four-year term will allow a mayor to work with the business community on projects from start to completion. We have seen in the past when a mayor has a consistent run, progress is made.

"A two-year term sends a message of instability, which is not what the business community likes to see when considering a city to invest in. Two years simply is not enough time to truly evaluate a mayor, nor is it enough time for the mayor to adequately effect change," Farland said.

Personally, I don't know a single business that decided NOT to invest in New Bedford, or any city, based on the term length of the mayor. I do know that business decide to move to a city or town based on the state of the economy, the skills of the local work force and tax incentives.

If a mayor that is bad for business is elected to a 4-year term, how does that help attract new businesses to the area? The idea of 4-year terms works when a business-friendly mayor is in office, but what happens if the opposite comes true? Then we are stuck with bad economic policy for four years. If a mayor implements policy that is bad for the economy, it is best to vote them out of office and replace them with a better mayor. If a mayor is doing well for the economy, then they'll be re-elected to another two years. If you hated President Obama or hate President Trump now, how did you feel knowing you have to deal with them for four years?

I'm not 100% against 4-year mayoral terms, but it has to be based on what is best for the city of New Bedford, not what is best for a segment of the city. This push feels like there is a candidate already in mind for 2019, and the goal is to get that person in for 4-years. Making a mayor comfortable isn't a valid point to extend a mayoral term to four years. We should want our leaders to feel they are accountable more often than not. We should want more democracy, accountability and higher voter turnout, not less.

Former New Bedford mayor Scott Lang thoughts on 4-year mayoral terms

Former New Bedford mayor Scott Lang shared his thoughts on a move to move the New Bedford mayoral term from two years to four. The question will be a on the ballot on November 7th.

Full interview:
<https://www.newbedfordguide.com/chris-resendes-interview-with-former-new-bedford-mayor-scott-lang/2017/10/14>

Catch The Chris Resendes Show live at 7pm every Thursday on New Bedford Guide's Facebook page.

New Bedford School Committee candidates talk MCAS

Are you for or against MCAS? New Bedford School Committee candidates were asked this question at the Mayor's Youth Council forum on Thursday at the Whaling Museum.

Seated from left to right: John Oliveira, Josh Amaral (I) and Richard Porter III. Colleen Dawicki couldn't make it due to a prior commitment.

Chris Resendes interview with former New Bedford mayor Scott Lang

Chris sat down with former New Bedford mayor Scott Lang to discuss his political career, domestic violence and more.

Catch The Chris Resendes Show live at 7pm every Thursday on New Bedford Guide's Facebook page.

November 7th New Bedford elections preview

The final election will be held on November 7th. October 3rd preliminary results can be seen [here](#).

Mayor

Jon Mitchell (I)

Charlie Perry

At-Large City Council

Brian K. Gomes (I)

Linda Morad (I)

Deborah Coelho (I)

Naomi R.A. Carney (I)

Ian Abreu (I)

Christopher Boerl

Michael Jansen

Ward 1 City Council

Melissa Costa

William Markey

Ward 2 City Council

Edwin Cartagena

Maria Giesta

Ward 3 City Council

Hugh Dunn (I)*

Ward 4 City Council

Dana Rebeiro (I)

Joseph Jo-Jo Fortes

Ward 5 City Council

Paul Chasse

Scott Lima

Ward 6 City Council

Joe Lopes (I)*

New Bedford School Committee

Josh Amaral (I)

John Oliveira

Colleen Dawicki

Richard Porter III

Assessor

Martin "Marty" Treadup (I)*

* running unopposed

(I) = incumbent

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<https://www.facebook.com/groups/newbedfordpolitics/>