



Mary's Center

**Testimony before the
Judiciary Committee of the District of Columbia**

on

**B21-0028
"Local Resident Voting Rights Amendment Act of 2015"**

**By Maria S. Gomez
President and CEO of Mary's Center**

July 8th 2015

Dear Councilman McDuffie and members of the Judiciary Committee.

It is with great pride and joy that I testify today in favor of the Bill that would expand the definition of a qualified elector to include permanent residents in local Washington, DC elections.

When I became a naturalized citizen in my early 20s, I remember the feeling of *isolation* instantly disappearing and the *burning desire to serve* blossoming. And for almost 30 years at Mary's Center I have been paying it forward by making sure that others in a similar situation as newly arrived immigrants can prosper and serve in their own communities.

This Bill is not taking any rights from anyone; it will not add more votes to one party or the other, and it will not increase the Latino vote. Instead, it will provide more voices on issues that we all care about, such as affordable childcare and healthcare, safe neighborhoods, top quality neighborhood schools, parks and senior centers and decent and affordable grocery stores. These are basic issues that require the many diverse voices of people who feel that they belong in this city because they see that their vote matters.

Your support for this Bill will provide city residents who are already deeply committed to this country, and particularly to our city, the opportunity to partner with us on these very important issues. These are people from all over Africa, Asia, Europe, the Middle East and Latin America who cherish our democracy, with all of its faults, and who worked hard to get here and become part of this freedom quilt. They have already been screened and have not been found to be rapists, criminals or infectious, and they hold jobs in areas of great need in this region. These are individuals who enrich our lives by allowing us to eat well and sleep well in elegant restaurants and hotels, raise our children to be bilingual, and have clean homes and offices, and they are our professional colleagues who bring fresh and new ways to solve problems in our workplaces.

In my opinion, all individuals who pay taxes and can afford to live in this city should be granted a voice in local politics. Understanding that today we have this limited and yet very courageous Bill before us, I urge each member of this Council and our citizens of the District of Columbia to support this Bill that will unite us as one city on issues that help all of us live more peaceful, purposeful and prosperous lives.

Thank you for the opportunity to be heard today. I am very optimistic that the citizens of DC, each City Councilmember and the Mayor will see that this is a reasonable Bill to pass, as we continue to fight for our own voting rights in our city. Now is the time to demonstrate our inclusiveness and independence.