

MAYOR OF LONDON

Andrew Boff AM

Chair of the London Assembly

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Dear Andrew,

Thank you for your letter of 23 November 2021 about the motions agreed at the London Assembly (Plenary) meeting on 11 November. My replies to motions 1 and 13 are set out below:

Motion 1 – Residence Based Voting Rights

I share the Assembly's concerns regarding certain provisions in the Elections Bill, especially the introduction of mandatory photographic voter ID and the removal of voting rights for some European Londoners. I agree that these provisions have the potential to impact the ability of a significant number of Londoners to fully engage in the democratic process, and decisions impacting them, their families, their communities and their city.

It is essential that the ongoing voting rights in local elections of all European Londoners are guaranteed. That is why I continue to urge the Government to reconsider plans that remove the voting rights of European Londoners who have arrived from 1 January 2021, and are not citizens of Ireland, Malta, Cyprus, Spain, Portugal, Luxembourg or Poland.

EU Londoners make a huge contribution to our great city and the country, so the Government must ensure EU Londoners will not be disenfranchised and that they will be properly informed about their civic and democratic rights. I thank the Assembly for their acknowledgement of the European Londoners Hub, which continues to provide comprehensive and up-to-date guidance and information for EU citizens in 28 community languages, including resources that explain their rights as settled EU citizens after the Brexit transition period. Over two million people have now accessed the European Londoners Hub.

I believe it is time that young people have a say in decisions affecting their future. One important way to achieve this would be to reduce the voting age to 16 and invest in citizenship education, media literacy and political literacy resources. Young people are more than capable of engaging in the democratic process, and they want to be heard. I agree that we should look to Scotland and Wales, which have expanded the franchise by age and by residency, so that all Londoners aged 16 and over, irrespective of nationality, have an equal democratic say. I, therefore, share your call for residence-based voting rights as this would encourage belonging and trust in the democratic system and institutions.

The introduction of mandatory photographic voter ID would represent another barrier preventing many Londoners from accessing their democratic right to vote. All the evidence suggests that the introduction of certain forms of photo voter ID is trying to solve a problem that does not exist. I share the concerns raised by the Joint Committee on Human Rights about the potential racial discriminatory impact of this proposal, and I support calls from a range of officials, academics and community groups asking the Government to reconsider it.

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In August 2021, I wrote to the Rt Hon Chloe Smith MP, the then Minister of State for Constitution and Devolution, highlighting these concerns around further barriers to civic and democratic participation, and renewed calls for democratic reform. I have not yet received a response from the Department. I have sent briefings on the Elections Bill to London MPs and other parliamentarians as well as a wide range of Peers at various stages in the passage of the Bill, pointing to compelling evidence of the potential negative impact of the proposed legislation drawn from the City Intelligence team and community organisations serving London's most under-registered and under-represented communities. As Chair of the Assembly, I am glad that you have written in these terms to the Minister and I have also followed this up with a letter to the relevant Minister in the Lords, Lord True, of which you should have received a copy of.

Civic and democratic participation are key pillars of social integration, and all Londoners who contribute to our city by living, working here and paying taxes should be recognised and allowed to vote in local elections. To this end, I will continue to urge the Government to rethink, to work together and cross-party, to further civic and democratic participation for all Londoners by addressing the most damaging elements of the Elections Bill. I also look forward to continuing working with you on these key issues.

Motion 13 – Elections Bill

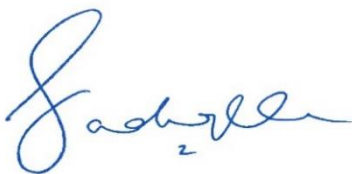
Similar to my comments on Motion 1, I share the Assembly's concerns regarding a number of provisions in the Elections Bill, including the Government amendments that change the London Mayoral voting system. I am particularly concerned over the way these clauses were introduced without prior consultation with the bodies and organisations that these changes will directly affect.

As you are aware such a move would overturn the 1998 Greater London Authority referendum result which specifically described a supplementary vote system that Londoners voted overwhelmingly in favour of. Democracy is about choice, which is why voters can choose to not allocate a second choice. I am also in agreement with the House of Commons Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee's conclusions around the lack of consultation and transparency in introducing the clauses that will fundamentally change voting in Mayoral and London Assembly elections to the First Past the Post system.

I am also writing to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) Minister Kemi Badenoch, who is now responsible for the Bill and DLUHC Minister Lord Greenhalgh. I agree that it would be helpful if we were both signatories to these letters and I will ask my team to share them with you.

Thank you for raising your concerns with me and I look forward to continuing to work with you on the Elections Bill as it progresses through parliament.

Yours sincerely,



Sadiq Khan
Mayor of London