

By [No More Guantamos](#)

This Saturday, April 24, Leverett voters at Town Meeting overwhelmingly approved a resolution welcoming one or two cleared Guantánamo Bay detainees to the community once Congress lifts its current ban. It is the second US municipality to do so. The resolution is identical to one approved on November 4, 2009, by Town Meeting members in nearby Amherst.

The resolution, Article 27 on the warrant, was the last article considered. Elizabeth Adams, a Leverett resident, initiated the resolution's placement on the warrant by petition. She is a founding member of Pioneer Valley No More Guantánamos, which supported both the Amherst and Leverett resolutions. Adams also belongs to Witness Against Torture, a national organization.

Adams was pleased by town voters' favorable vote, which she said "will go a long way toward healing the wounds inflicted on prisoners and our collective conscience by US torture policy and illegal indefinite detention."

Over several weeks leading up to the vote, Adams and other Leverett residents distributed information to residents about the resolution and the two men whom Pioneer Valley No More Guantánamos would like to welcome, Ahmed Belbacha, of Algeria, and Ravil Mingazov, the last Guantánamo detainee from Russia. The resolution itself does not name specific detainees, however.

The committee also organized a public forum, held in the Leverett Library on April 13, where several speakers, including two lawyers for some of the detainees, shared stories about several Guantánamo prisoners and knowledge about past and current government policies related to the prison and the detainees. Town residents who had attended the forum spoke in favor of the resolution at Town Meeting and responded to a few

other residents' concerns and questions, including the potential danger and costs to the town.

Portia Weiskel, a Leverett resident, said she was struck at the forum by individual stories of some of the men still held at the prison. She wanted her government representatives to know that "there is a community that stands for something."

Another town resident, Joe Levine, explained why he felt both main clauses of the resolution were important. "If you send a letter saying 'Lift the ban, but don't bring them here,' you're being hypocritical." He said it was necessary to say that Leverett is willing to do its share.

Nancy Talanian, director of No More Guantánamos and a member, with Adams, of its Pioneer Valley chapter, applauded the measure's passage in Leverett. She said, "Leverett's resolution supports the basic right of freedom for cleared Guantánamo Bay detainees who cannot safely return to their home countries. Without cooperation from U.S. communities and Congress, the long-awaited plan to close Guantánamo may not succeed."

Talanian noted that Congress's 'not-in-our-backyard' ban stands in the way of encouraging international cooperation in closing the prison. "Guantánamo detainees who cannot safely return home are really no different than other refugees whom western Massachusetts communities have welcomed in the past," she said. "And if the US government, which has held the men for more than eight years, can tell allied governments the men would not pose a danger if sent to live in their countries, then Americans should rest assured that we can be safe with some of them living here."

No More Guantánamos is a coalition of concerned U.S. residents, communities, organizations, and attorneys who are working together to ensure justice for the prisoners at Guantánamo Bay, Bagram air base in Afghanistan, and other offshore prison sites maintained by the CIA and the Pentagon around the world. We work to ensure basic human rights for

all prisoners, including the right to be either charged for crimes and tried or released, in accordance with international law, and not held indefinitely, and to find homes for prisoners who cannot return home.

The organization formed soon after President Obama's executive order to close Guantánamo Bay prison by January 22, 2009. Chapter locations besides the Pioneer Valley include Raleigh-Durham, North Carolina; New York City; Denver, Colorado; and Tallahassee, Florida.