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DEMOCRATIC MAYORS PUSH IMMIGRATION CHANGES

By Josh Dawsey
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New York Mayor Bill de Blasio vowed Monday to lead a national push on changing immigration laws, convening U.S. mayors and Obama administration officials at Gracie Mansion for a strategy session.

Mr. de Blasio faces long odds. President Barack Obama recently chose to take executive action aimed at shielding five million people from deportation, at least temporarily, because of daunting odds of immigration changes in Congress.

Republicans swept to a majority in both houses last month and have criticized Mr. Obama, saying he is overstepping presidential authority.

But the mayor, flanked by a range of Democrats, including the mayors of Atlanta, Buffalo and San Francisco, said he was hopeful that deeper changes would come. The group, which spent the day at the mayor's home, met with senior White House officials, including Obama confidante Valerie Jarrett.

In many of the cities, Hispanic populations have surged, the mayors said, along with deep fears of deportation. The mayors discussed how to enact Mr. Obama's rules and how to push for more comprehensive immigration changes.

"I'm going to be taking the names of mayors from across the country that I know, and I will be making calls to convince them that this is a tremendous opportunity, not only for their cities," said Buffalo Mayor Byron Brown. "This is a tremendous opportunity for our nation."

Mr. de Blasio said he would take a group of mayors to Washington and try to lobby Republicans in February.

It is unlikely conservative Republicans who are against amnesty for illegal immigrants will be wooed by New York's liberal mayor, said Ken Sherrill, a political-science professor emeritus at Hunter College. But the issue gives Mr. de Blasio another chance to embrace the national stage, which he has done on several recent trips to the capital, and gives the White House needed political support for an uphill push.

"It does matter what mayors in general think about something," he said.

Ed Cox, chairman of the New York state Republican Party, said the issue showed how Mr. de Blasio was trying to align himself with Mr. Obama, whose policies are unpopular in many places.

"We need to worry about securing the borders before we talk about doing immigration reform," Mr. Cox said. "This is just another example of Bill de Blasio worrying about Washington instead of taking care of and managing New York."

But the mayor's office said at least 114,000 New Yorkers would be helped by Mr. Obama's action, and that even more could be done. In the coming months, the city said it would help those who qualify fill out necessary paperwork to avoid deportation.