

ELEANOR HOLMES NORTON
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
**COMMITTEE ON
TRANSPORTATION AND
INFRASTRUCTURE**
SUBCOMMITTEES
CHAIRWOMAN, HIGHWAYS AND TRANSIT
AVIATION
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, PUBLIC
BUILDINGS, AND EMERGENCY
MANAGEMENT
RAILROADS, PIPELINES, AND HAZARDOUS
MATERIALS



**COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND
REFORM**
SUBCOMMITTEES
CIVIL RIGHTS AND CIVIL LIBERTIES
GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-1501

Testimony of Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton
Maryland General Assembly
Rules and Executive Nominations Committee
Consideration of A House Joint Resolution Concerning
United States of America – District of Columbia - Statehood
March 2, 2020

Chairwoman Healey, Vice Chairman Holmes and Members of the Committee, I regret that I cannot be in Annapolis to speak on this resolution in person because my congressional duties require me to be in the House of Representatives. However, I greatly appreciate the opportunity to submit this testimony in support of Delegate Gabriel Acevero's resolution calling for statehood for the District of Columbia. For myself and for D.C. residents, I want to thank Delegate Acevero from our neighboring state, which we work closely with, for his initiative in support of D.C. statehood.

The residents of the nation's capital are the only full federal taxpaying Americans who are not treated as equal citizens. Since the founding of the nation, District residents have always carried all the obligations of citizenship, including payment of federal income taxes and all other federal taxes and serving in each one of the nation's wars, all without voting representation in either house of Congress or freedom from congressional interference in purely local matters.

Statehood is the only solution that accords full and equal citizenship rights for residents of the District.

This has been an historic year for D.C. statehood. When I introduced the bill on the first day of this Congress, I did so with a record 155 original cosponsors. Today, the bill has a record 223 cosponsors, enough to pass in the House of Representatives with cosponsors alone. This bill is expected to pass the House before the summer recess. Moreover, we also have a record three-quarters of Democrats as cosponsors of the Senate version of the bill, and we are especially grateful to its sponsor, Senator Tom Carper.

Over 100 national organizations with strong records of getting bills passed in the Senate are already preparing to help us take the fight to the Senate. Last March, the House passed H.R. 1, the For the People Act, which was introduced by Maryland Congressman John Sarbanes and contains extensive findings supporting D.C. statehood, marking the first time in history either chamber of Congress had endorsed D.C. statehood.

Polls show that most Americans think the residents of the nation's capital have the same

MAIN DISTRICT OFFICE
RONALD REAGAN BUILDING AND
INTERNATIONAL TRADE CENTER
1300 PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE, N.W., SUITE M-1000
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20004-3007
(202) 408-9041
(202) 408-9048 (Fax)

2136 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20515-1501
(202) 225-8050
(202) 225-3002 (Fax)
WWW.NORTON.HOUSE.GOV

SOUTHEAST DISTRICT OFFICE
2235 SHANNON PLACE, S.E. SUITE 2032-A
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20020-7026
(202) 678-8900
(202) 678-8844 (Fax)

rights they enjoy. Many do not know that the District ranks first in the nation in federal taxes per capita paid to support the nation's government. The District pays more in federal taxes than 22 states. D.C. has a higher per capita personal income and gross domestic product than any state. Its qualifications for statehood are not in question.

The District's local economy has become one of the strongest in the nation. Today, the District is more than equal to states financially. Its \$15.5 billion budget is larger than the budgets of 12 states. For two decades, the District has had balanced budgets and clean audit opinions. Moody's Investors Service has given the District's general obligation bonds its highest rating, triple-A. Its per capita personal consumption expenditures are higher than those of any state, and its total personal consumption expenditures are greater than those of seven states. The population of the District continues to grow, a year ago surpassing 700,000 for the first time since 1975. D.C.'s population is larger than that of Wyoming and Vermont and is in league with the seven states that had a population under one million in the last census.

D.C. residents have fought and died in every American war, including the war that led to the creation of the nation, the Revolutionary War. The District suffered more casualties than a number of states during the wars of the 20th century, but I could not vote on final passage of the National Defense Authorization Act last year. The veterans of our nation's capital have helped get voting rights for people throughout the world, but continue to come home without those same rights or even the same rights as veterans with whom they served.

The D.C. statehood bill is clearly constitutional. Congress has the authority to make Washington, Douglass Commonwealth a state under its Article IV, Section 3, Clause 1 power to admit new states into the Union, combined with its Article I, Section 8, Clause 17 power over the seat of the federal government. The Congressional Research Service and even conservative legal scholar and practitioner Viet Dinh, who served in the Department of Justice during the George W. Bush Administration, have issued expert opinions that the D.C. statehood bill is constitutional.

The bill carves out the areas where D.C.'s residents live as the 51st state and preserves federal control over the core national capital area. The Constitution limits the maximum but not the minimum size of the capital. This 51st state, of course, would have no jurisdiction over the federal enclave that now consists of the Washington that most people associate with the capital of our country, the U.S. Capitol Complex, the principal federal monuments, federal buildings and grounds, the National Mall, the White House, and other federal property here that would remain under federal jurisdiction. The reduced federal district would be named the Capital.

My own family has lived through 150 year of change in the District since my great-grandfather Richard Holmes, as a slave, walked away from a plantation in Virginia and made his way to the District. It therefore gives me great honor to serve one of the nation's most cosmopolitan and vibrant jurisdictions.

We can no longer allow the residents of the District to be sidelined in the democratic process, watching as Congress votes on matters that affect them, with no say of their own, or watching as Congress overturns the laws of the duly elected D.C. Council. Full democracy

requires much more. The residents of the District deserve full control over their local affairs and full voting representation in the Senate and the House. They deserve statehood.

Congress has two choices. It can continue to exercise undemocratic, autocratic authority over the 705,000 American citizens who reside in our national capital, treating them, in the words of Frederick Douglass, as “aliens, not citizens, but subjects.” Or it can live up to this nation’s promise and ideals, end taxation without representation and pass the Washington, D.C. Admission Act.

I thank you again for allowing me the opportunity to submit this testimony, and I am especially appreciative of Delegate Acevero for introducing this resolution.