



Testimony for the House Rules and Executive Nominations Committee

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HJ 9 - United States of America - District of Columbia - Statehood

FAVORABLE

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The ACLU of Maryland urges a favorable report on House Joint Resolution 9 which would codify the State of Maryland's support of and consent to statehood for Washington, D.C.

Washington, D.C. is the only national capital in the democratic world whose citizens do not have equal voting and representation rights. The ongoing denial of full voting rights to the nearly 700,000 residents of D.C., most of whom are Black and Brown, is an egregious example of ongoing voter suppression happening in our country today.

D.C. Statehood Is a Racial Justice Issue

The denial of statehood to D.C. residents for more than 200 years is rooted in racism. In 1867, immediately after the Civil War, President Andrew Johnson vetoed a bill that would grant citizens of the District--including Black men--the right to vote. Congress overrode the veto, briefly granting notable and historic political influence to Black Washingtonians. But just as Black voters started to exercise their political power in D.C., Congress quickly replaced D.C.'s local government with federally appointed commissioners, blocking the heavily Black region from having full voting rights or control over its own local government. Congress made it clear that their goal was to disempower an increasingly politically active Black community.

The impacts of these heinous and ugly historical wrongs continue to reverberate today as more than 300,000 Black D.C. residents are denied full voting rights. If admitted to the union, the District would be the only plurality-Black state in the country.¹ The denial of full voting rights to DC

¹ <https://statehood.dc.gov/page/why-statehood-dc#:~:text=The%20District%20of%20Columbia%20is%20severely%20disadvantaged%20with%2000%20representation,Black%20state%20in%20the%20country.>



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residents today represents a continued effort to undermine Black political power and agency in the nation's capital.

Denying D.C. statehood means denying D.C. residents autonomy.

D.C. doesn't have control over its own laws or full control over its own criminal justice system. Unlike every other state, D.C. cannot pass its own laws without "congressional review," something Congress has repeatedly used to block the will of the people in D.C. Congress is also able to create its own laws for D.C. residents, without any input from D.C. residents themselves -- something Congress does frequently through forced "riders" on D.C.'s budget every year. Some of the many examples of how Congress has stepped in to block the will of the people in D.C. include:

- In 1998, Congress blocked D.C. from using its own funds to pay for an HIV/Needle Exchange Programs, stalling the program by nearly a decade and costing D.C. residents' lives and money.
- In 1989, Congress introduced the Dornan Amendment, which to this day still blocks D.C. from using its own local tax dollars to provide abortion coverage for individuals enrolled in Medicaid--something that all other states are free to do.
- In 1992, the D.C. Council legalized same-sex domestic partnerships in the Health Benefits Expansion Act, but Congress refused to allow D.C. to fund the measure until 2002, delaying benefits of the act for a decade.
- In 1981, the D.C. Council repealed the District's death penalty. In 1992, Congress ordered a referendum in D.C. in an attempt to reinstate the death penalty in the District.
- In 1981, Congress overturned legislation to decriminalize same sex activity in D.C., stalling D.C.'s effort to remove a discriminatory law against L.G.T.B.Q people by more than a decade.

D.C. already operates with the responsibilities of statehood--just without the same representation or rights afforded all other states. D.C. residents pay the highest per-capita federal income taxes in the U.S. In total, D.C. residents pay more in federal income tax than residents of 22 other states, but they have no say over how those federal tax dollars are spent by Congress.

It is long past time for D.C. to be granted statehood. Making D.C. a state is not a partisan issue, it is a campaign for equal civil rights. It is a democratic effort to re-enfranchise the nearly 700,000 Americans who have been wrongly



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denied their full voting rights for more than 200 years. D.C. residents deserve the same rights that we, as Maryland residents, enjoy.

For the foregoing reasons, the ACLU of Maryland supports House Joint Resolution 9.