

## TESTIMONY OF JOSLYN N. WILLIAMS

On House Joint Resolution 8  
Before the Committee on Rules  
Delegate Ann Healy, Chair

Monday, March 2, 2020

Madam Chair and Members of the Committee:

My name is Joslyn Williams. I am a citizen of the United States. I have been a resident of the District of Columbia for over 60 years. I served as President of the Metropolitan Washington Council, AFL-CIO for 35 of those years.

I would like to share a different perspective today. It is not a labor story. It is a personal story of why this fight for statehood matters so deeply to me.

My family was the first generation to come to the United States. We settled in Little Rock, Arkansas. I finished high school in Little Rock and then came to the District of Columbia to attend Howard University.

At Howard University, I became immersed in the student movement that protested the injustices that were all around us—a Woolworth Five and Dime Store that did not hire black people or allow them to eat at the lunch counter; an amusement park that didn't admit blacks; and a department store that did not allow Blacks to try on clothes prior to purchase.

But I believed in the American dream and I, like many others, was committed to making it a reality—bringing an end to discrimination and securing the right to vote.

So, I became an American citizen. I pledged that I would defend and protect our country from all enemies foreign and domestic, and in return this country promised me all the rights and privileges of citizenship, **including the right to vote!**

There was no asterisk on that right--- saying if you happened to live in a certain geographic area, the right didn't apply.

I have been fighting far too long to realize the promise that was made and not fulfilled.

This history of denial of our full citizenship rights has been nothing short of Un-American. Any small victories towards our right to vote have been grudgingly and incrementally gained.

We, as District residents pay more federal taxes per person than residents of any state, and we provide more revenue to the federal government than 30 other states. We have more residents than Vermont and Wyoming. District residents have fought and died in every American war.

Yet we do not have voting representation in Congress. We do not have a voice in passing these taxes or deciding how they will be spent.

We do not have full home rule. Unlike other state governments, the District is subject to the oversight and control of the United States Congress. Congress can and has denied the use of local taxpayer money, and we are constantly reminded that Congress can overturn any law passed by our local elected government reflecting the will of the people.

It took the 23<sup>rd</sup> amendment ratified in 1961 to extend the right to vote in presidential elections to our citizens. Yet no matter how much we grow; the District can never have more electors in the electoral college than the least populous state.

No American citizen should be required to live under these conditions. I am here to seek your assistance in remedying this injustice by supporting *Statehood for the District of Columbia*. The state of Maryland and the District of Columbia have a unique bond. Many of your residents come to work and visit the District each day. Many former District residents now live in the state of Maryland.

We are inextricably linked as people and as governments that must work together. Our history of collaboration – on transportation, the environment and criminal justice matters is based on your recognition and treatment of the District of Columbia as an equal partner. A vote for this resolution is a message to the other 49 states that the District of Columbia already functions responsibly and effectively as a state and that the time to formally recognize the District as a state is long overdue.

I ask that the Committee report out this resolution favorably. Thank you for affording me this time. I am prepared to answer any questions you might have.