



April 21, 2021

Vote YES on H.R. 51, the Washington, D.C. Admission Act

Dear Representative:

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, a coalition of more than 220 national organizations, we write to urge you to support H.R. 51, the Washington, D.C. Admission Act. Given the profound importance of this bill to the voting rights and broader civil rights of D.C. residents and nonresidents alike, and the historic racial justice implications of this vote, **The Leadership Conference will score the vote on final passage in our Voting Record for the 117th Congress.**

For over 200 years, the residents of Washington, D.C. have been disenfranchised and forced to bear the burdens of democracy without any of the benefits. Even though they pay federal taxes, fight in wars, and fulfill all of the other obligations of citizenship, they have no voice when Congress makes decisions for the entire nation on matters as important as war and peace, taxes and spending, health care, justice reform, education, immigration policy, or the environment. And while D.C. residents have long understood the unique nature of the city in which they live in the American constitutional system, they are not even given a single vote in decisions that affect D.C. residents and D.C. residents alone. Without as much as a single vote cast on behalf of D.C. residents, Congress decides which judges will hear purely local disputes under their city's laws, can overrule how local tax revenues will be spent, and what laws it may enact.

Our nation has made tremendous progress throughout our history in expanding the right to vote, including through the 15th, 19th, 24th, and 26th Amendments; and in the process, it has become more and more of a role model to the rest of the world. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 has long been the most effective law we have to enforce that right, and it has helped to elect members of Congress that increasingly look like the nation it represents.

Despite this progress, one thing is painfully clear: the right to vote is meaningless if you cannot elect anyone into office to represent you and choose that representative. Until D.C. residents have a vote in Congress and an independent say in their own affairs, they will not be much better off than African Americans in the South were prior to August 6, 1965, when President Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act into law – and until then, the efforts of the civil rights movement will remain incomplete.

The Washington, D.C. Admission Act would establish a process for the current city of the District of Columbia to be admitted as our nation's 51st state. It would lay the groundwork for the election of a Representative and two Senators to Congress. It would retain a separate and distinct seat for our federal government, by carving out a small area of the current

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District that includes the White House, the Capitol, the U.S. Supreme Court, and many other federal buildings. It also provides for the transfer of legal proceedings from the current district to the new state, where appropriate, and defines the legal relationships between the new federal district and the new state.

We urge you not to be swayed by the arguments that opponents of this bill will present on the House floor. This is a matter of finally ensuring voting rights for D.C residents and ending the era of taxation without representation in our nation, centuries after the American Revolution. You will hear that D.C. statehood would require a constitutional amendment, yet you will find few if any individuals who espouse that view willing to sponsor such a measure. You will hear that Maryland must consent to statehood, since it ceded land that now serves as the District, yet Maryland already went on record in support of D.C. when it ratified a proposed constitutional amendment in 1980 to provide full Congressional representation. You will hear that Congress would have to repeal the 23rd Amendment, so that a small handful of voters still living in the federal enclave do not enjoy three electoral votes, yet you will not hear why repealing it would pose any difficulty. Ultimately, opposition to this bill is not based on any of these arguments but is instead founded on the notion that it is a “power grab” by one party, yet you will not hear why other parties feel they cannot compete in an honest fashion for the votes of D.C. residents.

For these reasons, The Leadership Conference urges you to vote for H.R. 51. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Wade Henderson
Interim President & CEO



LaShawn Warren
Executive Vice President of Government Affairs