



June 25, 2020

## 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, I write to urge you to support H.R. 51, the Washington, D.C. Admission Act. I also urge you to vote against any motion to recommit the bill. 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 be scoring and including both the votes on final passage and the motion to recommit in our voting records for the 116<sup>th</sup> 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, 24<sup>th</sup>, 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.

President Trump's actions in response to the mass protests against police violence against Black Americans in Washington, D.C. over the last several weeks have only further underscored the need for D.C. residents to have meaningful sovereignty. In one shocking scene after another, the President has used the National Guard and federal law enforcement

### Officers

#### Chair

Judith L. Lichtman  
National Partnership for  
Women & Families

#### Vice Chairs

Thomas A. Saenz  
Mexican American Legal  
Defense and Educational Fund  
Hilary Shelton  
NAACP

#### Secretary/Treasurer

Lee A. Saunders  
American Federation of State,  
County & Municipal Employees

#### Board of Directors

Kevin Allis  
National Congress of American Indians  
Kimberly Churches  
AAUW

Kristen Clarke  
Lawyers' Committee for  
Civil Rights Under Law

Alphonso B. David  
Human Rights Campaign

Rory Gamble  
International Union, UAW

Lily Eskelsen Garcia  
National Education Association

Fatima Goss Graves  
National Women's Law Center

Mary Kay Henry  
Service Employees International Union

Sherrilyn Ifill  
NAACP Legal Defense and  
Educational Fund, Inc.

David H. Inoue  
Japanese American Citizens League

Derrick Johnson  
NAACP

Virginia Kase  
League of Women Voters of the  
United States

Michael B. Keegan  
People for the American Way

Samer E. Khalaf  
American-Arab  
Anti-Discrimination Committee

Marc Morial  
National Urban League

Janet Murguía  
UnidosUS

Debra L. Ness  
National Partnership for  
Women & Families

Rabbi Jonah Pesner  
Religious Action Center  
Of Reform Judaism

Lisa Rice  
National Fair Housing Alliance

Anthony Romero  
American Civil Liberties Union

Maria Town  
American Association of  
People with Disabilities

Richard L. Trumka  
AFL-CIO

Toni Van Pelt  
National Organization for Women

Randi Weingarten  
American Federation of Teachers

John C. Yang  
Asian Americans Advancing Justice |  
AAJC

President & CEO

Vanita Gupta



forces to violently attack D.C. residents and peaceful protesters merely so he could have a photo taken in front of a church, harass and terrify protesters elsewhere in the city through the use of low-flying helicopters, and close off portions of the city without meaningful involvement of D.C. residents through their local government.

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 begin by requiring DC voters to agree to statehood, something they have already expressed support for in the past, and it would lay the groundwork for the election of a Representative and two Senators to Congress. H.R. 51 would retain a separate and distinct seat for our federal government, by carving out a small area of the current District that includes the White House, the Capitol, the U.S. Supreme Court, and many other federal buildings. H.R. 51 also provides for the transfer of legal proceedings from the current District to the state of New Columbia, where appropriate, and defines the legal relationships between the new 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 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 candidates of other parties cannot compete in an honest fashion for the votes of D.C. residents, who should be able choose for themselves who represents them.

For these reasons, The Leadership Conference urges you to vote against any motion to recommit H.R. 51, and in favor of final passage. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Vanita Gupta  
President and CEO