

The Honorable Senator Gary Peters
724 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

May 3, 2021

Dear Senator Peters,

Earlier this month, the House of Representatives passed H.R. 51, the Washington, D.C. Admission Act, with unanimous support from Democrats for the very first time. In the United States Senate, S. 51 has more cosponsors than it ever has with 44 signing on in support. With this unprecedented momentum, we are writing to ask you – as the Chairman of the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee with jurisdiction over this matter – to take another momentous step forward for this movement by holding a hearing on D.C. statehood.

For more than 200 years, racist institutions have disenfranchised the people of Washington, D.C. District residents have lived in the shadow of the Capitol Building, the shrine of American democracy, for centuries without a voting voice in Congress. It is a civil rights and racial justice failure that the 700,000 people who call the nation's capital home – the majority of whom are Black or Brown¹ – do not have a say in the same government that surrounds them. The United States has the unfortunate distinction of being the only democracy in the world that denies the residents living in its capital city the full rights of citizenship.

Because Washington, D.C., isn't a state, Congress – the same one in which they have no voting representation – has the final say over the District's local laws.² This has led to Congress continuously trying to override the will of the people on everything from protections for reproductive health decisions³, to appropriate qualifications for childcare workers⁴, to family vaccination decisions.⁵ Beyond these domestic policy matters, denying D.C. statehood disenfranchises the nearly 30,000 veterans living in Washington, D.C., who are unable to fully participate in the democracy they fought to defend overseas. Residents of D.C. have fought and died in every single war that this nation has waged, with roughly 5,000 men and women in uniform from the nation's capital having paid the ultimate price and sacrificed their lives for this nation.⁶

¹ US Census Bureau (2019, July 1). "Quick Facts: District of Columbia." Retrieved 17 March 2021, from <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/DC/PST045219>

² Council of the District of Columbia, "How a Bill Becomes Law." Retrieved 20 April 2021, from <https://dccouncil.us/how-a-bill-becomes-a-law/>

³ Davis, A. (2015, April 30). "House votes to strike down D.C. law banning reproductive discrimination." Washington Post. Retrieved 21 April 2021, from https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/dc-politics/house-targets-dc-law-banning-reproductive-discrimination/2015/04/30/77f48dde-ef29-11e4-a55f-38924fca94f9_story.html?utm_term=.ecc64e4565ae

⁴ Austerhuhle, M. (2021, March 4). "Two Republicans introduce bill to overturn D.C.'s education requirements for child care workers." DCist. Retrieved 21 April 2021, from

<https://dcist.com/story/21/03/04/republicans-congress-overturn-local-education-requirements-for-child-care-workers/> ⁵ Davidson, L. (2021, February 9). "Utah Sen. Mike Lee seeks to block D.C. effort to allow kids to obtain vaccines without parents' consent." Salt Lake Tribune. Retrieved 21 April 2021, from <https://www.sltrib.com/news/politics/2021/02/09/utah-sen-mike-lee-seeks/> ⁶ Office of Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton. (2020, November 9). "Norton Introduces Resolution Honoring D.C. Veterans Who Served Their Nation Despite Being Denied Full Voting Representation in Congress and Home Rule." [Press release]. Retrieved 21 April 2021, from

<https://norton.house.gov/media-center/press-releases/norton-introduces-resolution-honoring-dc-veterans-who-served-their-0>

Furthermore, because Washington, D.C., isn't officially a state, the ramifications can extend to the safety of District residents and those who work or visit here. As we saw on January 6, D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser lacked direct authority over the D.C. National Guard. In this regard, D.C.'s chief executive is unlike all other state governments which exercise authority over their state's National Guard unit. Instead, the D.C. National Guard is uniquely controlled by the federal government. Testimony provided to the United States Senate found that lack of autonomy and jurisdictional authority played a major role in the significant delay in the National Guard response to the insurrection. More than three hours passed while the attack was unfolding and lawmakers, staff, reporters, and others in the United States Capitol were in fear for their lives. While the factors behind why and how the Capitol came under siege that day are complex and the subject of ongoing inquiry, one thing is clear: the lack of D.C. statehood undeniably was a leading factor in that day's failures.

Our fight for statehood embodies the notion of "no taxation without representation," the principle on which our country was founded. The people of Washington, D.C., pay more taxes than residents in 22 states and more in federal taxes per capita than any other state in the union⁷ and serve their communities and country in a myriad of ways. Yet, by virtue of where they live, they are silenced in our federal government. We ask you today to finally give D.C. residents a voice.

Without statehood for Washington, D.C., we cannot claim to live in a representative democracy. We urge you to hold a hearing on S. 51 and move us one step closer to actualizing our goal of a government for, of, and by the people.

Sincerely,

51 for 51

#NoRA

350 Eugene

44 Virtues

ACLU of the District of Columbia

ACLU of Michigan

Action Together Florida

Alliance for Justice

American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)

American Family Voices

American Humanist Association

Anacostia Coordinating Council

Be A Hero

Bend the Arc: Jewish Action

Blue Way Postcard Movement

Brady

Broward for Progress

Campaign for America's Future

Campaign Legal Center

Can't Stop! Won't Stop! Consulting

Center for Common Ground
Center for Disability Rights
Center for Law and Social Justice at Medgar Evers College, CUNY
Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW)
Clean Elections Texas
Clean Water Action
CODEPINK
Color of Change
Common Cause
Daily Kos
DC Democratic State Committee
DC for Democracy
DC Vote
DC Working Families Party
Demand Justice
DemCast USA
Democracy 21
Demos
Earth Action, Inc.
End Citizens United/Let American Vote Action Fund
Endangered Habitats League
Endangered Species Coalition
Equal Citizens
Faith for Black Lives
Faith in Public Life Action Fund
Fix Democracy First
Friends Committee on National Legislation
Generation Ratify
Greater NYC for Change
Herd on the Hill
Impulse GRoup DC
Indivisible
Indivisible Fighting 9
Indivisible Georgia Coalition
Indivisible Marin
Indivisible South Suburban Chicago
Indivisible Ulster
John Muir Project of Earth Island Institute
Just Democracy
Justice for Families
Lambda Legal
League of Conservation Voters (LCV)
League of Women Voters of the United States
Mainers for Accountable Leadership

March For Our Lives
Metropolitan Washington Council, AFL-CIO
MomsRising
NAACP New York State Conference
NARAL Pro-Choice America
National Association of Social Workers (NASW)
National Council of Jewish Women
National Employment Law Project
National Equality Action Team (NEAT)
Neighbors United for DC Statehood
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice
New Energy Economy
NOPE
Nuclear Information and Resource Service
Our Revolution
Our Revolution Michigan
Peace Action
People for the American Way
People's Parity Project
Physicians for Reproductive Health
Planned Parenthood Federation of America
Population Connection
Progressive Turnout Project
Rock the Vote
Service Employees International Union (SEIU)
Sierra Club
Southern Christian Coalition
Stand Up America
Stand Up! for Democracy in DC (Free DC)
Students Against Voter Suppression
Students for D.C. Statehood
Sunrise Movement
Take Back the Court
The AZ Ground Game
The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights
Un-PAC
Union of Concerned Scientists
Voices for Progress
We Testify
Women's March
Women's March Ann Arbor
Working Families Party

