



June 22, 2021

To: Members of the U.S. Senate

From: Virginia Kase, CEO League of Women Voters

Re: Pass S.51 the Washington DC Admission Act

The Senate will take a momentous step forward when the Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee holds a hearing on DC Statehood. District residents have lived in the shadow of the Capitol Building, the shrine of American democracy, for centuries without a voting voice in Congress. Without statehood for Washington, DC, we cannot claim to live in a representative democracy. We urge you to support passage of S51, the *Washington DC Admission Act*.

Lack of statehood for the District of Columbia, reinforces the racist institutions put in place in the over 200 years of our history. These institutions seek to disenfranchise the people of Washington, DC creating a civil rights and racial justice failure. Lack of representation for the 700,000 people who call the nation's capital home – the majority of whom are Black or brown – creates 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.

Furthermore, Congress – the same legislative body in which district residents have no voting representation – has the final say over the District's local laws. This has led to Congress continuously using the District's laws as a bargaining chip in legislative negotiations. Members of Congress also work to override the will of the people on everything from protections for reproductive health decisions and implementing a needle exchange program to weakening DC gun violence prevention laws.

Our fight for statehood embodies the notion of “no taxation without representation,” the principle on which our country was founded. The people of Washington, DC, pay more taxes than residents in 22 states and more in federal taxes per capita than any other state in the union 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 DC residents a voice.

Furthermore, because Washington, DC, is not officially a state, the ramifications can extend to the safety of District residents and those who work or visit here. During the pandemic, the District was treated as a territory rather than a state when it came to COVID-19 relief which resulted in residents being shortchanged on dire relief funds. In addition, as we saw on January 6, DC Mayor Muriel Bowser lacked direct authority over the DC National Guard. In this regard, DC's chief executive is unlike all other state governments which exercise authority over their state's National Guard unit. Instead, the DC 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 DC statehood undeniably was a leading factor in that day's failures.

We urge you to pass S. 51, the Washington DC Admission Act, and move us one step closer to actualizing our goal of a government for, of, and by the people.