



Statement for Virginia Kase, Chief Executive Officer League of Women Voters of the
United States

U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs Hearing on
Examining DC Statehood

June 22, 2021

Chairman Peters, Ranking Member Portman, and members of the Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee: we appreciate and commend you for holding this timely and critical hearing today to examine DC Statehood. My name is Virginia Kase, and I am the CEO of the League of Women Voters of the United States (the "League"). The League is a century-seasoned federated organization with more than 500,000 members and supporters across the country who carry out our mission to empower voters and defend democracy. The League has been advocating for full rights for DC citizens since 1938. After all these years, it has become clear that statehood is the only appropriate option if we want to live in a country that gives full rights of citizenship to all of its citizens—including those in the District of Columbia.

The League supports legislation which will create a 51st state from the residential and commercial areas of the District of Columbia while preserving a smaller federal district as the nation's capital. It has taken much hard work to get to this committee hearing. Our grassroots networks across the country have advocated for DC Statehood for years, joining petitions, building support, organizing watch parties for the Congressional hearing, and spreading the dream of DC statehood to communities around the country. The passage of S51, *the Washington DC Admission Act*, will finally end the 220-year struggle for equality that started when Congress disenfranchised the citizens living in DC through the passage of the *Organic Act of 1801*.

In recent months, we have seen the ramifications that a lack of self-governing control has had even in the halls of the US Congress. On January 6, DC Mayor Muriel Bowser lacked direct authority over the DC National Guard. DC's chief executive was unable to activate the DC National Guard in assisting the defense of the capital city. A lack of autonomy and jurisdictional authority played a significant role in the considerable delay in the National Guard response to the insurrection, putting members of Congress, their staff, and the hundreds of workers in the capital complex at risk. 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. The lack of DC statehood undeniably was a leading factor in that day's failures.

Congress has a historic opportunity to set aside partisan politics and end the disenfranchisement of hundreds of thousands of mostly Black and brown American citizens. The fight for DC statehood is a civil rights issue and cannot be separated from the battle for racial justice. Continued efforts to block full representation is discrimination against the people who live, work, and pay taxes in the district. For decades, Congress has refused to vote on statehood, based on racist accusations that DC cannot govern itself. It is long past time that we dispel these racist and discriminatory excuses and deliver justice to the residents of our nation's capital. Washington, DC has a population larger than two states and on par with six. Its economy is healthy and able to manage the shift of expenses involved in becoming a state.

Scholars from across the country have supported the constitutionality of this bill. The legislation maintains the federal District to a 2-square mile area that includes all the iconic buildings and monuments people think of when they think about our nation's capital. As defined in the US Constitution, Article 1, Section 8, Clause 17, the legislation establishes a redefined footprint of the capital reserved for the seat of our national government. At the same time, the rest of the current District, with schools, churches, grocery stores, parks, and people's homes, is freed to become the state of Douglass Commonwealth. The legislation also addresses the 23rd Amendment as it reiterates that complete control of the federal District is guaranteed to Congress.

The League of Women Voters of the United States strongly urges you to support S51, the *Washington, DC Admission Act*. This legislation will enable the 700,000 residents of DC to acquire full citizenship with equal rights to representation in Congress and self-government enjoyed by those who live in the 50 states.