



May 13, 2024

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The Honorable Mike Johnson  
Speaker of the House  
H-232, The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries  
House Minority Leader  
2433 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Johnson and Minority Leader Jeffries,

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, a coalition charged by its diverse membership of more than 240 national organizations to promote and protect the civil and human rights of all persons in the United States, and the undersigned organizations, we write to express our strong opposition to H.R. 7530, the D.C. Criminal Reforms to Immediately Make Everyone Safe (DC CRIMES) Act, and H.R. 5798, the Protecting our Nation's Capital Emergency Act of 2023.<sup>1</sup> Both bills are an unwarranted intrusion into D.C. local governance and represent yet another attack on the political power of Black plurality localities,<sup>2</sup> and therefore should be rejected.

These bills are the latest in a long line of attacks on democracy in the District of Columbia. D.C. residents pay federal taxes and comply with all the other duties of citizenship, yet they are deprived of any voting representation in Congress and have limited control over their own local governance. Through the District of Columbia Home Rule Act, Congress has the authority to reject or amend laws enacted by the District of Columbia, though it has only successfully done so four times since the 1970's when Congress passed the District of Columbia Home Rule Act, including once in the 118<sup>th</sup> Congress with the disapproval of the D.C. Revised Criminal Code Act.<sup>3</sup> With this vote, Congress would yet again interfere in the affairs of the District and relegate its more than 700,000 residents to second-class citizenship without the same voting rights enjoyed by citizens of states.

<sup>1</sup> **The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights will score the House's votes on these bills in its Voting Record for the 118<sup>th</sup> Congress.**

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., Kajeepeta, Sandhya. "When the state takes over: How state officials usurping local control threatens local Black political power." Thurgood Marshall Institute. Feb. 2024.

<https://tminstituteldf.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/When-the-state-takes-over.pdf>; Khalil, Ashraf, & Fields, Gary. "DC conflict reflects wider efforts undermining local control." *Associated Press*. March 3, 2023. <https://apnews.com/article/district-of-columbia-congress-crime-voting-race-5bb3af2306e6e8f5493475750b4289b3>.

<sup>3</sup> H.J. Res. 26, 118<sup>th</sup> Cong. (2023) (enacted).

D.C. autonomy and D.C. statehood are civil rights and racial justice issues.<sup>4</sup> D.C. residents deserve the same right as any other citizens to decide the laws that are best for their community. It remains painfully clear that the right to vote is meaningless if the will of D.C. residents can be subverted and micromanaged by a Congress that gives them no say in the matter.

D.C. residents are best situated to address their own criminal justice statutes and deserve to determine these policies without congressional interference. H.R. 7530 seeks to run roughshod over the duly elected D.C. Council. By amending the Youth Rehabilitation Act, a D.C. law that gives judges discretion to impose more rehabilitative sentencing for eligible young people, Congress would be ignoring decades of cognitive and youth justice research<sup>5</sup> and subvert the actions of the D.C. Council. The legislation would also take away the D.C. Council's ability to increase or decrease criminal liability sentences and delegate that responsibility to Congress. Such action would undermine the basic principles of home rule, wherein the duly elected council and the mayor govern the District. Congressional representatives are elected to represent their respective districts, not become de facto D.C. councilmembers. Congress should not be in the business of micromanaging the District's affairs.

H.R. 5798 would reduce public confidence in law enforcement by rolling back provisions that deter abuses of power and demonstrate that law enforcement is not above the law. Holding police officers accountable for violating the law does not lead to an increase in crime.<sup>6</sup> In fact, it may help bolster public safety: Between 2010 and 2020, Washington, D.C. paid out more than \$91 million in police misconduct settlements.<sup>7</sup> Yet, according to an audit, between 2015 and 2021, D.C. was forced to rehire 37 Metropolitan Police Department officers who were fired due to sustained misconduct allegations, with the city awarding them more than \$14.3 million in back pay.<sup>8</sup> Police oversight is crucial to preventing and holding officers accountable for misconduct against the very people they have sworn to protect.

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<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., Hearing on H.R. 51, the Washington, D.C. Admission Act. "Statement of Wade Henderson, Interim President and CEO, The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights." *United States House of Representatives Committee on Oversight and Reform*. March 22, 2021. <https://civilrights.org/resource/statement-of-wade-henderson-to-the-house-committee-on-oversight-and-reform-on-h-r-51-the-washington-d-c-admission-act/>.

<sup>5</sup> See, e.g., Arain, Mariam, et al. "Maturation of the adolescent brain." *Neuropsychiatric Disease and Treatment*. April 2, 2013. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3621648/pdf/ndt-9-449.pdf>. See also Mendel, Richard. "Why Youth Incarceration Fails: An Updated Review of the Evidence." *The Sentencing Project*. Dec. 2022. <https://www.sentencingproject.org/app/uploads/2023/03/Why-Youth-Incarceration-Fails.pdf>. Several states, including Alabama and Florida, have passed 'youthful offender' laws that recognize the need to improve outcomes for young people ages 18-26. Perker, Selen Siringil & Chester, Lael. "Time for Change: A National Scan and Analysis of Hybrid Justice Systems for Emerging Adults." *Emerging Adult Justice Project*. July 20, 2023. <https://www.eajustice.org/hybrid-systems>.

<sup>6</sup> Lo, Kenny & Figgatt, Sarah. "Violent Crime Rates Declined in 10 Jurisdictions Following Comprehensive Police Reform." *Center for American Progress*. Nov. 16, 2020. <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/violent-crime-rates-declined-10-jurisdictions-following-comprehensive-police-reform/>.

<sup>7</sup> Alexander, Keith L., et al. "The hidden billion-dollar cost of repeated police misconduct." *The Washington Post*. March 9, 2022. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/investigations/interactive/2022/police-misconduct-repeated-settlements/>.

<sup>8</sup> Gathright, Jenny. "D.C. Police Were Forced to Rehire More Than Three Dozen Officers Accused of Misconduct, Auditor Finds." *DCist*. Oct. 6, 2022. <https://dcist.com/story/22/10/06/dc-police-auditor-report-hiring-firing-misconduct/>. Former D.C. Police Chief Robert Contee previously noted his frustration with the disciplinary system and having to rehire such officers. *Ibid*.

These bills and other attacks on D.C.'s autonomy are emblematic of larger efforts to allow state and federal legislatures to exert control and authority over Black plurality localities and roll back democratically authorized reforms. **We call on you to fight this trend and vote NO on these bills.** If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Chloé White, senior policy counsel, justice, at [white@civilrights.org](mailto:white@civilrights.org).

Sincerely,

The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights  
Advancement Project  
American Civil Liberties Union  
ACLU of the District of Columbia  
American Humanist Association  
Autistic Women & Nonbinary Network  
Bend the Arc: Jewish Action  
Center for Policing Equity  
Church World Service  
Civil Rights Corps  
Common Defense  
DC Appleseed Center for Law and Justice  
DC Vote  
Drug Policy Alliance  
Episcopal Diocese of Washington  
Equal Justice USA  
Fair and Just Prosecution  
Free Minds Book Club & Writing Workshop  
Hip Hop Caucus  
Japanese American Citizens League (JAACL)  
Juvenile Law Center  
Law Enforcement Action Partnership  
Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law  
League of Women Voters of the District of Columbia  
League of Women Voters of the United States  
NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc.  
National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers  
National Coalition for the Homeless  
National Council of Churches  
National Urban League  
National Youth Justice Network  
Neighbors for Justice  
Reentry Working Group

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School Justice Project  
St. Mark's Episcopal Church  
The Campaign for the Fair Sentencing of Youth  
Thrive Under 25 Coalition  
World Without Genocide