



**TESTIMONY OF MURIEL BOWSER,
MAYOR OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**

**Before the Committee on Oversight and Reform
U.S. House of Representatives**

H.R. 51, Washington, D.C. Admission Act

September 19, 2019



Chairman Cummings, Ranking Member Jordan, and all members of this esteemed Committee, thank you for hosting this historic hearing on H.R. 51, the Washington, D.C. Admission Act, to make Washington, DC the 51st state.

I want to especially thank our Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton, who has championed equality for DC for her entire tenure, while skillfully delivering jobs, opportunity and greater self-determination.

I am Muriel Bowser, Mayor of Washington, DC, and I am honored to be here today to ask Congress to act upon the request of my residents to admit Washington, DC to join the United States of America as one of those states.

I was born in Washington, DC, and generations of my family — through no choice of our own — have been denied the fundamental right promised to all Americans: the right to full representation in the Congress guaranteed by statehood.

Over the years, there have been a lot of arguments against statehood.



1. “You’re too small,” they say. But we’re bigger by population than two states, bigger than all states but Oklahoma at the time they were admitted to the union. And what’s more, we pay more federal taxes per capita than any state. And we pay more total federal taxes than 22 states.

2. “You’re badly governed,” they say. In fact, we do a better job of that than most states. We have a budget of \$15.5 billion, which we have balanced 24 times in the last 24 years. And we already do the things that states do: we operate our own schools, we manage state Medicaid programs, and we receive federal block grants. Like states, we issue drivers licenses, license plates, and birth and death certificates. We regulate banks and insurance companies, operate our state-based Affordable Care Act marketplace, and we enforce environmental regulations. For the purposes of thousands of federal laws, we act as a state, and we do it well.

3. “The Constitution forbids it,” they say. That one is simply false as Constitutional experts have repeatedly proclaimed.



4. Or, “DC can’t be a state because the Constitution requires a federal district.”

This is false. The Constitution sets a maximum size of 10 miles squared for the federal district, but it does not prescribe a minimum size to qualify for the federal district or statehood.

I’m sure we’ll hear some of that again this time. But let’s face it: these are bad-faith arguments by people who really oppose statehood because they think it will mean two Democratic Senators. The fact is, denying American citizens a vote in the body that taxes them goes against the very founding premise of this nation.

And, yes, it is true that we are brown and liberal, but denying statehood would be unfair no matter who was affected—it would be unfair if we were conservatives from a rural district built around agriculture or an industrial city in the heartland.

This is America, and Americans are entitled to equal protection under the law, and that’s why you should support statehood.



It should not matter what our politics are or what yours are—that is beside the point. The point is that to continue to deny statehood to the 702,000 residents of the District of Columbia is a failure of the members of this body to uphold their oath of office.

The lack of statehood deprives us of more than just full representation in this Congress; it has practical and dire consequences.

- Our men and women register and are subject to the draft, but we have no congressional vote on whether to go to war. Since World War I, Washington, DC has sent nearly 200,000 brave men and women to defend and fight for democracy abroad, and tragically 2,000 of those patriots never made it home.
- The Supreme Court and other federal judges render judgments binding on us, but we lack Senators who can vote on their confirmations.
- We pay federal taxes, but we have no vote on how those taxes are appropriated.
- The prosecutors of our criminal laws are federal officials, not elected by the residents of Washington, DC.



- Worse, we are abused by Congress in ways that would be unconstitutional if we were a state.

If I may, I wish to point you back to the Civil Rights era. Neither the emancipation of this country's formerly enslaved persons, nor the Reconstruction Amendments meant to finally guarantee them their Constitutional rights, brought about the promise of liberty on which this country was founded. Instead, it took decades of struggle, the bravery of thousands, and the leadership of singular voices in this country to force that change. Among those leaders were elected representatives from this very house of both political parties who banded together and put politics aside for the higher principles and simple fairness.

In the past, granting self-government and voting representation to DC residents has garnered bipartisan support. There is no doubt that opponents of statehood have turned it into a political question – but ultimately it comes down fairness. So, I leave you with these questions:



Does Congress truly believe that the promise of democracy extends to all Americans citizens as outlined in the U.S. Constitution? Women and men, the North and the South, Blacks and Whites, Latinos and Asians, born here and from other lands? Will Congress rise above temporal partisan considerations and act like statesmen and women to grant us the statehood we, Americans just like those you represent, overwhelmingly endorsed at the polls?

I thank you for having me here, and I welcome all questions you may have about the next steps for DC statehood.