Thank you Chairman Cummings, Ranking Member Jordan, and members of the Committee. I am Phil Mendelson, Chairman of the Council of the District of Columbia (Council). I am pleased to testify today in support of H.R. 51, the Washington, D.C. Admission Act. Full and fair representation for the over 700,000 citizens residing in the District of Columbia is only possible through achieving statehood, and so I urge this Committee, and this Congress, to move favorably and expeditiously on this measure.

I want to thank this Committee for its ongoing support for the District of Columbia. In particular, I would like to thank the Delegate for the District of Columbia, Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton, for her staunch representation of the District and for introducing H.R. 51. I also want to thank Chairman Cummings for cosponsoring this legislation, and for agreeing to hold this hearing today and for committing to markup H.R. 51.
For over 200 years, citizens residing in the District of Columbia have been denied the same right of citizenship that is enjoyed by U.S. Citizens everywhere else: full self-governance, and representation in the national legislature. Denying this to the District of Columbia deprives these citizens of the fundamental rights of our democracy. This is inconsistent with the principles of our American revolution. And like other anomalies of the Founding Era (like the disenfranchisement of women and blacks) this civil rights injustice must be corrected. Statehood would do that.

Self-governance is the essence of democracy and freedom. It is more sensitive to constituents. It reflects community values and priorities. Self-governance is the lifeblood of every town hall, city council, county board, and state legislature in the United States of America. The only option to gain both full voting representation and full self-governance is to pass H.R. 51 and grant statehood to the District of Columbia.

THE CASE FOR STATEHOOD FOR THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

When the District of Columbia was established in the 1790s, its citizens had voting rights and self-governance. This was not immediately taken away. I find it instructive that nowhere in the Federalist Papers or James Madison’s notes will you find a discussion that it was a goal of the Founding Fathers to take our citizenship away. They wanted control of the seat of the federal government. That was their only focus. It has been over 200 years since Congress rescinded voting rights from the last group of Washington residents who had previously voted in Maryland and Virginia. To add to this injury, it is Congress that has plenary authority over all matters in the District. It is, to borrow a phrase, taxation without representation.

Numerous efforts have been made to correct this injustice, some of which were successful. In 1960, the 23rd Amendment was adopted, granting the District the same number of presidential electors as the smallest state. In 1970, the District of Columbia Delegate Act was enacted to give the District a representative in the House of Representatives. But, as you know, that position is non-voting – the same status as that of members from U.S. territories. In 1973, Congress adopted the Home Rule Act, a major reform for District governance, but that act is silent as to congressional representation. In 1978, the District’s non-voting delegate in the House of Representatives, Walter Fauntroy, introduced a constitutional amendment that would have given the District – two senators, a representative, and an unrestricted vote for President. While Congress approved the amendment, three-quarters of the states failed to ratify.

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1 District of Columbia Organic Act, 6th Congress, 2nd Sess., ch. 15, 2 Stat. 103.
2 U.S. Const. amend. XIII § 1.
In 2007, Senators Liberman and Collins reported bipartisan legislation to add two additional seats in the House of Representatives: a full voting member for the District and one for Utah. This approach relied on Congress's authority to legislate on matters for the District as well as to create and adjust the number of congressional seats in the House of Representatives. Unfortunately, a Senate cloture vote to simply proceed on the measure fell short by three votes.

There have been other efforts at restoring voting rights for District residents by retroceding all populated areas of the city back to the State of Maryland. The most recent iteration of this idea was introduced in the House in 2013. Advocates of retrocession have argued that it is the most practical and constitutionally sound way to give District residents votes in both the House and the Senate, and that it makes historical sense when compared to the previous retrocession of Arlington to Virginia. This may be logical, but the proposal is unpopular with the citizens in both the District and Maryland. More importantly, Congress can't force this on Maryland. So it is impractical. Full statehood is the most practical way to fully restore the rights of those who now live in the nation's capital.

The idea of the Washington D.C. Admission Act was first proposed in 1971. It would carve out the geographic core of the city to remain a federal enclave, while establishing the remainder of the city as the state of Washington, D.C. This approach is consistent with long standing practice, having already been employed 37 times. Congress granted statehood to several territories that were in existence for less than 10 years. On the other hand, the last three states admitted to the Union – Hawaii, Alaska, and Arizona – were territories for 61, 47, and 49 years, respectively, before being granted statehood. The District has been around for 214 years. We had these rights way back then. It's time we had them again.

While I staunchly advocate for District statehood, I recognize that there are hurdles. Unfortunately, many of these hurdles are simply a matter of national politics and efforts by parties jockeying for majorities in Congress. Many state legislatures see the disadvantage to admitting a new state that might affect their state's influence in the House or Senate, and many state legislatures do not understand that the United States citizens of the District of Columbia raise their own taxes and pay for their own schools but are not equal to the United States citizens in any of the 50 states.

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9 See Legislative Hearing on H.R. 5388, the District of Columbia Fair and Equal Housing Voting Rights Act of 2006 (testimony for the record of Lawrence H. Mirel for the Committee for the Capital City) (Sept. 20, 2006).
It is also important for the District to acknowledge that education of the nation of the District's half-status is also an important hurdle that we must clear. But most people will agree that the idea of tax-paying citizens without full representation in the United States Congress is a concept so foreign and against everything we are taught in school about the basic democratic values of our country. Many do not believe it, or are forced to square this injustice using misconceptions about the District. The District of Columbia is unique in many ways, but no unique qualities should support disenfranchisement of its citizens.

**THE DISTRICT ECONOMY: A MODEL FOR OTHER JURISDICTIONS**

Since Congress granted the District of Columbia home rule in 1973, the District has had both successes and challenges. Perhaps our greatest challenge was the imposition of a Control Board in 1995, which essentially stripped our local government of its limited autonomy. The Control Board era forced the District to confront its finances head on and to realign the relationship between the District and the federal government. In less than six years, the District was back on solid financial footing and the Control Board was dissolved. Today, the District is thriving, and we are financially strong. This is a far cry from the image many still harbor about the District.

The Council recently approved the fiscal year 2020 budget. The fiscal year 2020 budget is the District's twenty-fourth consecutive balanced budget and the fourth to be adopted under local budget autonomy. The District's budget prioritizes principles of responsible budgeting, fiscal responsibility, and efficient use of public resources. Indeed, our fiscal position has become the envy of other states, counties, and cities. Both our pension and Other Post-Employment Benefits funds are fully funded, using conservative actuarial assumptions. At the conclusion of fiscal year 2019, our reserves will be equal to 60 days operating costs – a Government Finance Officers Association best practice.

We have established a system for multi-year capital planning to bring all capital assets to a state of good repair by fiscal year 2028; no other jurisdiction has this. Our independent Chief Financial Officer is developing resiliency strategies that include recession planning and cybersecurity analysis. The District continues to grow in population and jobs, and is diversifying its economy. As a result, revenues to

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12 The Control Board was established pursuant to the District of Columbia Financial Responsibility Management Assistance Act of 1995, approved April 17, 1995 (Public Law 104-8, 109 Stat. 142), to oversee the finances of the District.
15 The District continues to make these capital investments while still remaining below our locally-mandated 12 percent debt cap. See D.C. OFFICIAL CODE § 47-335.02(a). Incidentally, Congress mandated an 18 percent limit.
support the budget are growing on average more than 3 percent annually. This fiscal strength has resulted in ratings for our general obligation bonds being upgraded by all three rating agencies, including AAA by Moody’s.

The District is growing, our tax base is growing, our financial reserves are healthy, our capital spending is disciplined, and our retirement funds are, combined, best in the nation. Few localities, and even fewer states, can boast of such achievements. These successes have a direct correlation to statehood for the District.

Opponents of statehood have long argued that the District is not capable of governing itself in a fiscally responsible manner. In 1992, the last time Congress seriously considered statehood for the District, the committee report that accompanied H.R. 4718, the New Columbia Admission Act, laid out three main requirements to evaluate statehood petitions.\(^{16}\) The dissenting views raised doubts as to whether the District had the economic viability — meaning both population and resources — to support a state government that was independent of other states and the federal government, and whether the District had the resources to bear its equitable share of the cost of the federal government.\(^{17}\) Well, the District’s financial status is the envy of the jurisdictions around the country. Our fundamentals are solid, with 16.7 percent population since 2010 — highest compared to the 50 states. Revenues are growing steadily and at a rate greater than most states. And we don’t have unfunded liabilities unlike most states. Further, we are a donor state, contributing far more to the federal government in taxes than we receive in federal grants and federal payments. It seems to me that the District by operating under budget autonomy has more than answered the doubts raised almost 30 years ago about its economic viability. The District is flourishing and is more than capable of meeting the financial cost of becoming the 51st state.

**CONGRESSIONAL INTERFERENCE**

Moreover, the District has been able to prosper even with unnecessary congressional interference in our local affairs. Every year we watch as members of Congress, who have no connection with the District, introduce legislation or insert appropriations riders that detrimentally impact the functions of government. The policies of the District government are at many times at the mercy of whichever party is in control of Congress. As a District policymaker, I can tell you that this hurts our ability to manage the affairs of our government.

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\(^{16}\) See H. Rep. No. 102-909 (1992). The three requirements are as follows: (1) That the inhabitants of the proposed new State are imbued with and are sympathetic toward the principles of democracy as exemplified in the American form of government; (2) That a majority of the electorate wish statehood; and (3) That the proposed new State has sufficient population and resources to support State government and to provide its share of the cost of the Federal government. *Id.*

\(^{17}\) *Id.*
One case in point is the restriction of the District’s ability to tax and regulate marijuana. When District residents overwhelmingly approved Initiative 71 in 2014 to provide for the legalization of possession of minimal amounts of marijuana for personal use, we were reflecting a trend among the 50 states. But Congress has stepped in to prohibit the District from passing laws to regulate this industry. The Council was challenged on whether having a public hearing on the taxation and regulation of marijuana was a violation of the Anti-Deficiency Act. One has to think that Congress surely has more important things to worry about than about this uniquely local issue. Worse, we are in an untenable situation: residents may possess and use marijuana (just like many other states) but government (the District government) is unable to regulate the sale. However, I would like to thank the House for removing that rider this year and I hope the Senate will follow suit.

Another case in point is the appropriation rider that prohibited needle exchange — a government program to reduce the spread of HIV and other diseases. The program exists in many cities. It is proven to reduce infection, the spread of disease, and fatalities. Yet the District was precluded from it, while Congress provided no alternative help. After many years the rider was finally lifted. But the damage to the public health remains to this day. The essential point here is that the District requires full self-governance if it is to improve further. The nation’s capital should be a model for the country. The current governance situation holds us back.

As you know, the Home Rule Act also places limitations on what laws the Council can approve. As a result, we cannot fix inequities in criminal sentencing without the approval of the United State Attorney General, and we cannot update the limits on small claims or strengthen our Anti-SLAPP law because we cannot legislate judicial process. Further, the Home Rule Act requires Congressional review of all permanent and temporary bills passed by the Council. But that review has not resulted in a single congressional disapproval in almost three decades.

Congressional review of legislation is not only unnecessary it has a significant impact on the operations of the Council. In 2009, the Council’s General Counsel estimated that between 50 and 60 percent of the legislative measures the Council adopts could be eliminated if there were no congressional review requirement. He added that the congressional review requirement from time to time has resulted in gaps in critical pieces of criminal legislation that cannot be cured with a retroactive applicability date because of the ex post facto clause of the Constitution. Under

18 See the Legalization of Possession of Minimal Amounts of Marijuana Personal Use Initiative of 2014, effective February 26, 2015 (D.C. Law 20-153; 62 DCR 880).
20 Pathways to Statehood, From Voting Rights to Full Self-Determination: Political and Constitutional Considerations: Public Hearing before the Council of the District of Columbia Special Committee on Statehood and Self-Determination, June 1, 2009 (written testimony of Brian Flowers, General Counsel of the Council of District of Columbia, at 5).
21 Id. at 6.
section 602 of the Home Rule Act, the Council has passed thousands of laws and transmitted thousands of pages to Congress, which requires significant staff time and effort, and only three acts have been disapproved and none since March 21, 1991. Our General Counsel correctly noted at the time “Congress may not legislate with the District in mind very often, but we always legislate with Congress in mind.” Congressional review of District legislation has proven to be inefficient, ineffective, and unnecessary.

These are a few examples of how denying the right of full congressional representation, and control of local government to 703,000 residents is counterproductive and bad governing, while also fundamentally unfair and contrary to the values and ideals of the United States of America.

The District’s success, even in the face of these hurdles that no other jurisdiction must endure, demonstrates that, in addition to our being entitled to full and fair representation, the District is capable of managing its affairs just like any state. To that end, we stand on our record of responsible governing.

An example of the District’s sound governing practice is the District’s management of its budget after the Council approved and the voters by referendum ratified, the Local Budget Autonomy Act of 2012. Removing the uncertainty over the District’s budget authority has ensured that its budget is not being inefficiently spent on unnecessary borrowing costs or paying a premium for services. Under budget autonomy, the District has met the immediate needs of a thriving city. The flexibility of budget autonomy has allowed the District to address the urgent service and programmatic needs of the city, from trash collection to public safety response, and it has ensured that these services are delivered efficiently in terms of both time and resources.

Another advantage to budget autonomy: it has ensured that the delivery of services – to residents, to visitors, and even to the federal government – is not disrupted due to federal budget battles which have no relation to the District or its budget. As U.S. Representative Tom Davis noted in 2003, while Congress’s involvement in the District’s budget stems from a desire to ensure the financial well-being of nation’s capital, “the unfortunate reality is that the city’s local budget can get tied up in political stalemates over congressional appropriations that rarely have anything to do with the District’s budget.” The District has proven that it can manage its business similar to a state and can function without congressional oversight.

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22 Id.
23 Supra note 14.
As for oversight, the Council conducts rigorous oversight over all of the District agencies that report directly to the Mayor of the District of Columbia, as well as numerous independent and regional agencies and bodies, e.g., DC Water, the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, and the Washington Metropolitan Airports Authority, and over District-related issues.

The Council, through its twelve committees, holds performance and budget oversight hearings on every District agency. During these hearings the committees can scrutinize the past and present performance and the budgetary needs of each agency. The Council also holds numerous public oversight hearings and roundtables over agencies and specific subject-matter areas. Further, the Council holds hearings and roundtables on legislation and resolutions throughout the year since the Council is a full-time legislature.

During Council Period 22 (January 2, 2017 to January 1, 2019) the Council and its various committees held over 600 meetings, hearings, and roundtables. In 2018, the Council recorded almost 900 hours of meetings, hearings, and roundtables. The Council held 36 Legislative Meetings in Council Period 22. The Committee of the Whole held 18 regular meetings and 21 additional meetings to consider legislation and reports in the Committee and process reports from other committees. This is further proof that congressional interference of the actions of the District government are unnecessary and are unwarranted.

RESPECTING THE WILL OF DISTRICT RESIDENTS: END TAXATION WITHOUT REPRESENTATION

In April of 2016, the New Columbia Statehood Commission (Commission) announced that the District of Columbia would pursue statehood through an approach modelled on the Tennessee Plan. This would entail the creation of a contemporary constitution and boundaries for the state of Washington, Douglass Commonwealth. The Commission set out to convene a series of town hall meetings, culminating with a three-day District-wide constitutional convention. The Commission then adopted a draft Constitution and state boundaries.

The draft Constitution and boundaries were then sent to District residents for ratification. Over 85 percent of District residents who voted in our 2016 general election approved a referendum to grant authority to the Council to petition Congress to enact a statehood admission act and to approve the District’s Constitution.25 Passage of the referendum established that the citizens of the District: (1) agree that the District should be admitted to the union as a State; (2) approve a Constitution of the state of Washington, Douglass Commonwealth, as adopted by the Commission;

25 See Advisory Referendum on the State of New Columbia Admission Act Resolution of 2016, effective July 12, 2016 (Res. 21-570; 63 DCR 9627).
(3) approve the boundaries for the state; and (4) agree that the state of Washington, Douglass Commonwealth shall guarantee an elected representative form of government.

In light of this action, Congress needs to respect the will of the District residents. District residents want and deserve fair and equal representation. Continuing to ignore the voice of District residents’ request for statehood is to ignore democratic values. Until this is done the residents of the District will continue to feel left out of the democratic process which is not what was envisioned when this country was founded.

Our founding fathers could have never envisioned disadvantaging the rights of citizens of the federal district. In fact, James Madison in Federalist #43 contemplated that the residents of the District would not be disenfranchised when he wrote “[citizens of the federal district] will have their voice in the election of the government which is to exercise authority over them[.]"26 The mandate “No Taxation Without Representation” is deeply engrained in the founding principles of this nation. I believe the Founding Fathers would disagree that 703,000 taxpaying citizens of the United States should lack voting representation in the national government, as well as lack local control over their lives.

FURTHER ARGUMENTS IN OPPOSITION TO STATEHOOD

Some have argued that the population of the District should be a disqualification for full participation in the Union. While decidedly small, population is not, and should not be a requirement to become a state. Moreover, the District’s population is greater than that of two existing states, Vermont and Wyoming. Further, at the growth rate we have seen in recent years it is reasonable to that additional states will become smaller in population.

Some say that the vast amount of land owned or controlled by the federal government within the District is another disqualification for statehood. There is, to be sure, a substantial amount of federal land in District. However, the sixty-plus other square miles of the District are not unlike other states. Compared against the states, the District has the third lowest total actual number of acres under federal control and has the 13th lowest number of federal acres as a percentage of total land, ranking behind a few notable states including Alaska, Montana, Arizona, and Wyoming.27 Under the provisions of the Washington, D.C. Admission Act, much of the federal acreage in our borders would be retained as a federal enclave, leaving the state of Washington, Douglass Commonwealth with even less land under federal control.

26 The Federalist No. 43 (James Madison).
Additionally, some have argued that large, current federal grants and payments to the District are another disqualification for statehood. In truth, however, the vast majority of the federal dollars that the District receives consists of Medicaid and other federal program subsidies received by all the states. We used to receive a substantial federal payment in addition to the federal program allocations, but that was eliminated over two decades ago.

Another way to look at the issue of federal grants is to compare it to how much in taxes a state remits to the federal government. The District of Columbia paid $28.4 billion in taxes in 2018. 28 The amount paid is more than 21 other states. 29 This fact is astonishing when considering the size of the District compared to other states.

Attached to my testimony is a chart that compares the federal funding received and taxes paid by the District to ten states with populations comparable to that of the District. First, it shows that the difference between what the District pays in taxes and what it receives in federal grants is more than $24 billion. 30 Second, it shows the District's total payment to the federal government minus the funding it receives is about 10 times that of Vermont, Wyoming, Alaska, and North Dakota — states with populations almost identical to the District. 31 Finally, the facts show that, in the end, the District is a significant contributor to the federal government, more so than many other states in the country.

CONCLUSION

Full statehood is the only practical way that our citizens can participate in a fully democratic government. It is the only way to ensure that our local government will never be subject to a shutdown because of quibbling over purely federal matters, and our local services not suspended because of partisan disagreements. It is the only way to give our residents locally elected representatives to enact purely local laws that would not be subject to national debates over divisive social issues. It is the only way to ensure a judicial system that is representative of our community values. Statehood is the only way to give residents a full, guaranteed, and irrevocable voice in the Congress of the United States. The same voice enjoyed by our peers across the country.

Statehood is the most practical solution to right the historical wrong of denying voting rights to citizens of the District and to guarantee the right to local self-

29 Id.
30 See Exhibit 1.
31 Id.
governance. The District of Columbia has a proven track record of prudent fiscal management spanning over two and a half decades. The State of Washington, D.C. would enter the Union as a 51st state with an economy envied by other jurisdictions. Politics must be set aside, and all of the excuses used to justify denial of our inalienable rights must be shelved. Our limited home-rule power delegated by Congress is appreciated, but too tenuous and too often a bargaining chip in political battles. Limited home-rule cannot make up for all of the other rights withheld by Congress that we could have only with statehood.

One of the most important points that is never mentioned by the opponents of District statehood is that we are the only national capital in the free world where the citizens do not enjoy a vote in the national legislature. Indeed, Mexico which had modeled its federal system — including a federal city as its national capital — recently granted statehood to Mexico City. It is now our time. We, the District of Columbia, are unique in the world. The United States is the greatest democracy in world and the fact that the citizens of its nation’s capital do not have voting representation is no longer warranted and is a station on our democracy. We implore Congress to treat us as equals and no longer as second-class citizens.

The Council appreciates the Committee’s consideration of the Washington, D.C. Admission Act, and urges that it be brought before the Committee for a favorable markup and before the House and Senate for a vote. The Council and I look forward to working with the Committee to move this bill forward to ensure that the next time I am called to testify it will be as Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of the state of Washington, D.C.
EXHIBIT 1
TEN STATE RECIPIENTS OF FEDERAL FUNDS COMPARED TO TAXES PAID WITH A POPULATION COMPARABLE TO THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA (Dollars in Thousands)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jurisdiction</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Total Federal Grants – FY2018&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Total Internal Revenue Service Collections FY2018&lt;sup&gt;2&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Total Contribution to Federal Government minus Federal Grants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>District of Columbia</td>
<td>702,455</td>
<td>$3,920,973&lt;sup&gt;3&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>$28,443,717</td>
<td>$24,522,744</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vermont</td>
<td>577,737</td>
<td>$2,014,977</td>
<td>$4,417,527</td>
<td>$2,402,550</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wyoming</td>
<td>626,299</td>
<td>$1,872,033</td>
<td>$4,930,650</td>
<td>$3,058,617</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alaska</td>
<td>737,438</td>
<td>$3,703,011</td>
<td>$5,287,377</td>
<td>$1,584,366</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Dakota</td>
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<td>$2,020,693</td>
<td>$6,578,855</td>
<td>$4,558,162</td>
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<tr>
<td>South Dakota</td>
<td>882,835</td>
<td>$1,753,165</td>
<td>$8,200,403</td>
<td>$6,447,238</td>
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<tr>
<td>Delaware</td>
<td>967,171</td>
<td>$2,595,853</td>
<td>$19,038,671</td>
<td>$16,442,818</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rhode Island</td>
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<td>$3,240,462</td>
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<tr>
<td>Montana</td>
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<td>$12,291,272</td>
<td>$9,887,266</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>1</sup> Federal Funds Information for States Grants Database, https://www.ffis.org/database (last visited Sept. 16, 2019). Data on federal grants to states for Fiscal Year 2018


<sup>3</sup> Does not include federal payments to the District government which totaled $118,650,000 in FY 2019.