

# Congress of the United States

## House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM

2157 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6143

MAJORITY (202) 225-5051  
MINORITY (202) 225-5074  
<https://oversight.house.gov>

### Opening Statement Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton Hearing on “H.R. 51: Making D.C. the 51st State” March 22, 2021

Chairwoman Maloney, along with the residents of the District of Columbia, I greatly appreciate and thank you for this hearing today.

This has been a historic year for D.C. statehood. I introduced [H.R. 51](#) with a record 202 original cosponsors. Today, the bill has 215 cosponsors, which virtually guarantees passage in the House, even with cosponsors alone. The Senate version, [S. 51](#), was introduced with a record 38 original cosponsors and now has 41 cosponsors. We are particularly grateful to our Senate sponsor, Senator Tom Carper, who gathered the largest number of original cosponsors ever.

**When the House passed the D.C. statehood bill last Congress, it was the first time in history a chamber of Congress had passed the bill. With Democrats controlling the House, the Senate and the White House, we have never been closer to statehood.**

Under [H.R. 51](#), the State of Washington, D.C. would consist of 66 of the 68 square miles of the present-day federal district. The reduced federal district, over which Congress would retain plenary authority, would be two square miles and consist of the Washington that Members of Congress and visitors associate with the nation’s capital, including the U.S. Capitol complex, the White House, the Supreme Court, the principal federal monuments and the National Mall. It would be called the Capital.

**[H.R. 51](#) has both the facts and the Constitution on its side. The Constitution does not establish any prerequisites for new states, but Congress generally has considered a prospective state’s population and resources, support for statehood and commitment to democracy.**

**D.C.’s population of 712,000 is larger than that of two states and the State of Washington, D.C. would be one of seven states with a population under one million. D.C. pays more federal taxes per capita than any state and pays more federal taxes than 21 states. D.C.’s budget is larger than those of 12 states. Eighty-six percent of D.C. residents voted for statehood in 2016. In fact, D.C. residents have been petitioning for voting rights in Congress and local autonomy for 220 years.**

The Constitution’s Admissions Clause gives Congress the authority to admit new states, and all 37 new states have been admitted by an act of Congress. The Constitution’s District Clause, which gives Congress plenary authority over the federal district, sets a maximum, not a

minimum, size of the federal district. Congress previously has reduced the size of the federal district by 30 percent. The 23rd Amendment to the Constitution does not establish a minimum geographic or population size of the federal district. Conservative legal scholar and practitioner Viet Dinh, who served as an Assistant Attorney General in the George W. Bush Administration, has opined that the State of Washington, D.C. can be admitted by an act of Congress.

**D.C. residents have fought in every American war, including the war that led to the creation of the nation, the Revolutionary War. The servicemembers from our nation's capital have helped get voting rights for people throughout the world, but continue to come home without those same rights or even the same rights of those with whom they served.**

**My own family has lived through almost 200 years of change in D.C. since my great-grandfather Richard Holmes, as a slave, walked away from a plantation in Virginia and made his way to D.C. Today, it is my great honor to serve in the city where my family has lived without equal representation for almost two centuries.**

**Congress can no longer allow D.C. residents to be sidelined in the democratic process, watching as Congress votes on matters that affect the nation with no say of their own, or watching as Congress votes to overturn the laws of the duly elected D.C. Council with no say of their own. Full democracy requires much more. D.C. residents deserve full voting representation in the Senate and the House and complete control over their local affairs. They deserve statehood.**

**Congress has two choices. It can continue to exercise undemocratic, autocratic authority over the American citizens who reside in our nation's capital, treating them, in the words of Frederick Douglass, as "aliens, not citizens, but subjects." Or it can live up to this nation's promise and ideals, end taxation without representation and pass [H.R. 51](#).**

Madam Chairwoman, thank you again for your leadership on D.C. equality.

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