



TESTIMONY FROM D.C. DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES COUNCIL
Hearing for H.R.51: Making D.C. the 51st State
House of Representatives Committee on Oversight and Reform
March 22, 2021

Thank you, Chairperson Maloney, for holding this hearing to consider H.R. 51, a bill to make “Washington, Douglas Commonwealth” the 51st state. The D.C. Developmental Disabilities Council (DDC) enthusiastically supports H.R. 51, the Washington, D.C. Admission Act, providing for the admission of the State of Washington, D.C. into the Union. We see statehood as a disability issue rooted in self-determination, and we know that opposition to D.C. statehood has deep roots in slavery and oppression of African-Americans.

This kind of discrimination is all too familiar for the disability community. The DDC, mandated under the federal “DD Act,” is a body appointed by the Mayor and tasked with strengthening the voice of D.C. residents with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) and their families. There are fifteen individuals currently on the council – including persons with I/DD, family members, and organizational representatives - who identify and address the needs of people with disabilities in the community through education and advocacy. The DDC supports greater independence, inclusion, and empowerment of those with I/DD, and strives to create change that eliminates discrimination and removes barriers to full inclusion. We highly value cultural and linguistic competence, the strong African American culture and history of D.C., and our current rich diversity. We strive to incorporate anti-racist principles into all of our work.

The disability rights movement motto is “nothing about us, without us!” Achieving D.C. statehood would be directly in line with DDC’s mission. It is particularly important that individuals with I/DD and their families have the opportunity to have their voices heard. Without statehood, residents of D.C., including those with I/DD and their families, do not have the full representation in government that is granted to those in the rest of the fifty states. Being denied participation in decisions that will impact their lives is a barrier all too familiar to disabled people. The disability rights movement is rooted in the idea that people with I/DD deserve to be able to speak for themselves, make their own decisions, and control their own lives. Because of the lack of full representation, these are rights that people with disabilities in D.C. -many of them people of color - are currently unable to exercise. It is in direct violation of their rights, and it needs to stop.

Members of Congress make decisions that will hurt people with disabilities in D.C. every time they vote to cut Medicaid or repeal the Affordable Care Act. Although we do our best to work with sister DD councils around the country, without statehood, the voice of people with I/DD in D.C. will never be heard on these issues that impact their ability to fully participate in their community. As reflected in the 2017 Residential Information Systems Project, funded by the HHS Administration on Community Living, 13,511 people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) live in D.C..¹ In total, the U.S. Census Bureau estimates that there are 705,749 people living in D.C.,² which is a larger population than both Wyoming and Vermont.

Passing H.R. 51 would right a wrong that has been wrong for far too long. We urge both houses of Congress to move toward equity by making D.C. the 51st state!

¹ Table on page 29 - https://ici-s.umn.edu/files/aCHyYaFjMi/risp_2017

² <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/DC>