

ELEANOR HOLMES NORTON
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
**COMMITTEE ON
TRANSPORTATION AND
INFRASTRUCTURE**
SUBCOMMITTEES

CHAIRWOMAN, HIGHWAYS AND TRANSIT
AVIATION

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, PUBLIC
BUILDINGS, AND EMERGENCY
MANAGEMENT

RAILROADS, PIPELINES, AND HAZARDOUS
MATERIALS



**COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND
REFORM**
SUBCOMMITTEES
CIVIL RIGHTS AND CIVIL LIBERTIES
GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-1501

Testimony of Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton
Committee on Agriculture
Member Day
December 11, 2019

Chairman Peterson and Ranking Member Conaway, I am pleased to testify on H.R. 4885, the McIntire-Stennis Act District of Columbia Equality Act, which would amend the McIntire-Stennis Cooperative Forestry Act (Act) to make the District of Columbia eligible for funding. The District is treated as a state for federal programs, with very few exceptions, most of them simply oversights or failures to update. The exclusion of the District from the Act appears to have been an oversight, as I shall explain presently. My bill would rectify the exclusion of the District from the Act, ensuring equitable treatment for the District and allowing the District to benefit from the funding opportunities available under the Act.

The Act provides U.S. states and territories with formula funds to support state-designated institutions' cooperative forestry research programs. The Act defines "State" to include Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands and Guam. The District's notable, but faulty, absence from this definition makes it ineligible for funds that would support research at the District's state-supported university, the University of the District of Columbia (UDC). UDC's College of Agriculture, Urban Stability, and Environmental Science complements the District's ongoing forestry efforts. UDC is the nation's only urban land-grant university.

We appreciate that Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands and Guam are included under the definition of "State," even though, unlike District residents, their residents do not pay federal income taxes. It would be particularly troubling if the District, whose residents pay the highest per capita federal taxes, which support farm and other federal programs, continued to be excluded.

It has been argued that the District should be excluded because of its lack of local timber production. However, the Act says, "[i]n making such apportionments, consideration shall be given to pertinent factors including" local timber production. Proximity to timber is, therefore, only one in a non-exclusive list of factors that is part of the larger analysis regarding the apportionments. Excluding the District from the definition of "State" merely because it is not located in an area with a timber industry runs counter to the intent of the Act. While timber production can be a factor in determining the amount of state allocations, there is no reason that the District should be excluded from the Act.

Moreover, UDC would particularly benefit from funding from the Act. The goal of the

MAIN DISTRICT OFFICE
RONALD REAGAN BUILDING AND
INTERNATIONAL TRADE CENTER
1300 PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE, N.W., SUITE M-1000
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20004-3007
(202) 408-9041
(202) 408-9048 (Fax)

2136 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20515-1501
(202) 225-8050
(202) 225-3002 (Fax)
WWW.NORTON.HOUSE.GOV

SOUTHEAST DISTRICT OFFICE
2235 SHANNON PLACE, S.E. SUITE 2032-A
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20020-7026
(202) 678-8900
(202) 678-8844 (Fax)

Act goes well beyond providing money to study timber production, and UDC's position as the nation's only urban land-grant university would make it especially well-qualified for funding under this Act. With increased urbanization in the United States, it is more important than ever that urban areas also deal with the unique issues related to urban forestry and maintaining native ecosystems, and UDC is helping lead the charge. For example, UDC has an Urban Gardening and Forestry Outreach program that provides District residents with information on the benefits of the city's many trees and the natural resources trees provide. As UDC notes on its website describing this particular program, "[District] [r]esidents are educated about tree care, forestry niche crops and the invasive species that threaten the ecosystem." Moreover, this program provides education materials, does demonstrations and workshops, provides technical assistance to interested parties, and conducts site visits and consultations. As urban areas face increasing environmental stress, it is more important than ever that our universities study matters such as how urban forests and trees can help with flood mitigation and water absorption. UDC already works with the District to help reintroduce native species into Rock Creek Park, including trees that are part of larger forest restoration efforts. It is important to avoid stereotypes about jurisdictions that could be deprived of funding for which they would otherwise qualify. It is unconscionable that UDC cannot get funding under the Act for its forestry programs simply because of its location in the District.

We believe, therefore, that the exclusion of the District must have been the result of an oversight during the original drafting of the Act. However, as you can imagine, this exclusion has serious consequences for the District, rendering UDC ineligible for these funds. Passage of my bill would allow students and researchers in the nation's capital to take part in this important forestry program.

Again, I appreciate your allowing me to testify today, and I look forward to working with you to enact this bill.