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DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

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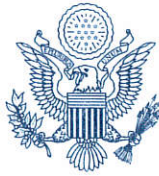
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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-1501

Statement of Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton
House Committee on Oversight and Reform
“H.R. 51: Making D.C. the 51st State”
September 19, 2019

Chairman Cummings, Ranking Member Jordan, members of the Committee, I appreciate the opportunity to offer this statement for today’s hearing. This hearing marks the necessary first step in the District of Columbia’s journey to become the nation’s 51st state.

Chairman Cummings, let me begin by thanking you for your outstanding leadership in assisting the District in many significant ways, and particularly for holding this historic hearing. This is the first House hearing on statehood for the District in over a quarter of a century. We especially appreciate your being an original cosponsor of the Washington, D.C. Admission Act (H.R. 51), your strong statement of support when I introduced the bill on the first day of the 116th Congress, your promise to hold this hearing and a mark up of the bill this year, and your willingness to work to take H.R. 51 to the House floor for a vote. Your support helped ensure our record number of original cosponsors (155) when we introduced the bill. Importantly, I am pleased that we now have a record number of cosponsors for our bill, 220, of whom 217 are full voting members, and we expect more Members to vote for H.R. 51 on the House floor. This is by far the largest support for D.C. statehood in congressional history. We also have a record 34 cosponsors of the Senate version of our bill (S. 631), sponsored by Senator Tom Carper. Over 100 national organizations have endorsed H.R. 51. In March, the House passed H.R. 1, the *For the People Act*, which contained extensive findings supporting D.C. statehood, marking the first time in American history either chamber of Congress has endorsed D.C. statehood; Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) strongly endorsed D.C. statehood upon introduction of H.R. 51; House Majority Leader Steny H. Hoyer, a cosponsor of the statehood bill, endorsed D.C. statehood in a strong op-ed earlier this year; and Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer unveiled a sweeping proposal to combat voter disenfranchisement, including restoring the Voting Rights Act, establishing national, automatic voter registration laws, and supporting D.C. statehood.

I am grateful, and, more importantly, District residents are grateful, Mr. Chairman, for today’s hearing. We are appreciative that this hearing will allow Members of Congress and the public to become better educated about a flaw in our democracy, where the residents of our nation’s capital do not have the same rights and privileges enjoyed by other Americans. Yet the residents of the nation’s capital rank first in the nation in federal taxes per capita paid and are the only full taxpaying Americans who are not treated as equal citizens. You have helped make the District’s unequal status a matter of serious national concern, one that can only be rectified by

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passage of H.R. 51. To quote Leader Hoyer when he graciously endorsed and cosponsored the bill, "the only path to ensuring [the District's] representation is through statehood."

Although District residents lack the full privileges afforded by statehood, including two senators and full representation in the House of Representatives, we have worked to achieve, with success, as many elements of home rule as we could this Congress. For example, the House-passed fiscal year 2020 Financial Services and General Government appropriations bill, for the first time, did not appropriate D.C.'s local funds. We have also been able, annually, to exempt the D.C. government from federal government shutdowns every year since the 2013 federal government shutdown. These are among the important advances we have achieved without statehood, but the only way to guarantee full equality for the District is passage of H.R. 51, permanently giving our residents the full benefits of citizenship that only statehood can afford.

Today's witnesses are essential to showing that there are no financial, economic, constitutional or historical reasons that bar D.C. statehood. The District's local economy has become one of the strongest in the nation, and D.C. has carried state functions before. After a dip in the national economy, the District, like the rest of the country, experienced financial management issues, so Congress authorized the creation of a control board and enacted the National Capital Revitalization and Self-Government Improvement Act. Today, the District is more than ready to be treated as an equal to the other states financially. Its \$15.5 billion budget is larger than the budgets of 14 states, and its \$2.8 billion general fund balance is the envy of the states. Less than 1% of the District's budget consists of congressional appropriations not available to other jurisdictions. For two decades, the District has had a balanced budget and clean audit opinions on its financial statements. Moody's Investors Service has given the District's general obligation bonds its highest rating, Aaa. The District's per capita personal income is higher than that of any state; its per capita GDP is higher than that of any state; its total personal income is higher than that of seven states; its per capita personal consumption expenditures are higher than those of any state; and its total personal consumption expenditures are greater than those of seven states. The population of the District continues to grow. A year ago, it surpassed 700,000 for the first time since 1975. D.C.'s population is larger than that of Wyoming and Vermont and in the league with the seven states that had a population under one million in the last census.

This hearing will lay out the many reasons why the residents of the District need statehood. I see these reasons every single day in my role as the District's elected delegate to Congress. I cannot vote on final passage for any bill that affects our country, including the 700,000 residents of the District. I cannot cast a final House vote even on bills that affect only the District. I cannot vote on matters of major importance to my constituents, such as whether to raise or lower taxes or to go to war. This summer, the House passed the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). District residents have fought and died in every American war, including the one that led to the creation of the nation, the Revolutionary War. There were more casualties from the District than from a number of states during the wars of the 20th century, but I could not vote on the NDAA's final passage for our 700,000 residents. The veterans of our nation's capital continue to come home without the same rights as the veterans of every state in the country or even those in the countries they have assisted.

H.R. 51 is clearly constitutional. Congress has the authority to make Washington, Douglass Commonwealth, a state under its Article IV, Section 3, Clause 1 power to admit new states to the Union, combined with its Article I, Section 8, Clause 17 power over the seat of the federal government. The Congressional Research Service, the American Civil Liberties Union and even conservative legal scholar and practitioner Viet Dinh, who served in the Department of Justice during the George W. Bush Administration, have all issued expert opinions that H.R. 51 is constitutional.

I appreciate, Chairman Cummings, that this hearing will show the accident of history in Philadelphia and in the First Congress that has led to the disenfranchisement of the American citizens residing in the nation's capital ever since. It is impossible to believe the Framers, who fought under the mantra of "no taxation without representation," would have created a capital of disenfranchised citizens. Moreover, because of the status of the citizens of its nation's capital, the United States has been found in violation of the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights, to which the United States is a signatory, twice. It is irrational to believe that the Framers would have intended the residents of D.C. to have fewer rights than others in the Union or to be left without the local control the Framers believed essential to democratic governance.

Congress can make the neighborhoods where D.C.'s residents live the 51st state and preserve federal control over the core national capital area, as the Framers intended. This is exactly what our bill does.

We have experienced profound change in both the District and in the nation itself in the 218 years since the District became the official capital of our country. I am proud that the Holmes family has been a part of that history for over 150 years. My own family has lived through enormous changes in the District since my great-grandfather Richard Holmes, as a slave, walked away from a plantation in Virginia and made his way here. Three generations of the Holmes family went to segregated schools, as required by the Congress of the United States. Today, the District is one of the nation's most cosmopolitan and vibrant places to live. The District, in federal taxes paid and in military service rendered, is no less than the equal of the states. Yet its citizens remain treated as second-class citizens in their own country, denied the full benefits of equality that are bestowed on their fellow Americans.

Congress can no longer allow the residents of the District to be sidelined in the democratic process, watching as Congress votes on matters that affect them, but with no say of their own, or watching as Congress overturns the laws of the duly elected D.C. Council. Full democracy requires more. The residents of the District deserve local control over their local affairs and full voting representation in the Senate and the House of Representatives. We deserve statehood.

Congress has two choices. It can continue to exercise undemocratic, autocratic authority over the 700,000 American citizens who reside in our national 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 the Washington, D.C. Admission Act.