

**Testimony of Congresswoman Stacey Plaskett (VI)**

**Committee on House Administration**

**Hearing: “Member Day”**

**November 21, 2019, 8:30 AM, 1310 Longworth Building**

Chairwoman Lofgren, Ranking Member Davis, members of the committee. Good morning and thank you for the opportunity to present a statement of my views on legislation and matters under the jurisdiction of this committee.

I would like to use my time addressing a few specific areas, and in particular to speak to concerns of the island territories of the United States.

Congress doesn't always acknowledge the contributions that the territories make to our nation; but the geographical importance of the territories and our high participation rates in the United States armed forces are clearly an integral contribution to our country.

The five populated U.S. territories – the Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, and American Samoa – are part of America. The nearly four million people residing on these U.S. islands are Americans. They are subject to Federal law. Hundreds of thousands from our islands have served in the United States armed forces. Many have died in their service to our country.

Yet, these millions of Americans have almost no say in Federal decision-making, even when it directly effects the American territory that they live on. U.S. citizens in U.S. territory do not have right to vote for the President

of the United States. They do not have equal voting representation in the Congress. This has a direct correlation to persistent poverty across all of the U.S. territories.

In addition, the territories are excluded or under-included in important federal laws under this committee's jurisdiction that are intended to protect voting rights and election systems, such as the Federal Election Campaign Act of 1971, the National Voter Registration Act of 1993, and the Help America Vote Act of 2002. Federal law also, inexplicably, requires that election ballots for the Delegate from the Virgin Islands and American Samoa to the House of Representatives must be separate from those for other elected officials. These are but a few examples.

That is why, when this committee brought to the floor an aggressive package to address long-standing issues of voting rights and election reform, H.R. 1, the For the People Act of 2019, I fought hard for the bill to call for progress on the voting rights and election integrity issues facing Americans in U.S. territories.

As passed by the House, H.R. 1 calls for a congressional task force to review these issues, and requires the task force to make recommendations on providing U.S. citizens residing in U.S. territories with equitable voting representation in Congress, voting rights in the presidential election, and fair inclusion in the federal voter protection and election integrity laws.

While H.R. 1 remains pending in the legislative graveyard that is otherwise known as the United States Senate, I have recommended that this committee

further explore the federal voting rights, federal voter protections, and federal elections in the U.S. territories through a field hearing.

Furthermore, there are other ways in which this committee has power to improve and provide more equitable federal treatment of Americans in the territories. I ask that you consider support for my bill, H.R. 405, to permit each territory of the United States, along with the District of Columbia, to provide and furnish statues honoring their citizens for placement in Statuary Hall in the same manner as statues honoring other American citizens.

As we all know, each State has two statues in the U.S. Capitol commemorating two citizens important to its history. The U.S. territories are the only American jurisdictions that are not permitted any statutes in the Capitol. The District of Columbia was allowed one through special legislation in 2012, and the Delegate from the District has later sought legislation to have a second. My bill, H.R. 405, would allow all Americans to see two statutes from their corner of the country when they visit the Capitol.

I would also encourage the committee to look at fair inclusion of the seals of the U.S. territories and the District of Columbia where the seals of the 50 States are depicted in the Capitol complex, such as in the main reading room of the Thomas Jefferson Building of the Library of Congress.

I close by thanking you for your consideration, for working with me in the past, and for your support of Americans residing in U.S. territory.