Congressional Interference in District of Columbia Local Affairs

The quest for Statehood for the people of DC is not only about securing full representation in the US Congress, but also about securing rights to self-governance and local autonomy in the District of Columbia.

Under the District Clause of the U.S. Constitution (Article 1, Section 8), the U.S. Congress continues to exercise authority over DC local affairs. Congress reviews all DC legislation before it can become law. Congress can modify or even overturn such legislation. It can impose new and unwanted laws on the District. And it retains authority over the District’s local budget, most of which is funded only by taxes levied by the District on its residents.

Members of Congress routinely impose their own personal political agendas on the District of Columbia and its residents. Recent examples include:

- Expanded federally funded private and religious school voucher programs.
- Barred District spending to offset the costs of abortions for low-income residents.
- Challenged DC’s medical marijuana program and prohibited DC from taxing, regulating and commercializing marijuana sales.
- Challenged DC’s efforts to control gun violence.
- Blocked needle-exchange programs aimed at reducing the spread of HIV/AIDS.
- Threatened to repeal DC marriage equality laws.
- Challenged DC’s Death-with-Dignity laws.
- Threatened to prevent implementation of a successful citizen initiative to require minimum wages for tipped workers.
- Attempted to block DC from implementing Obamacare on behalf of residents seeking affordable health care.

Opinions may vary on these issues; but that is not relevant. What is relevant is the problem underlying all of them: Congress, without the consent of the governed, routinely acts to circumvent DC’s democratically enacted laws and budgets.

Every State in the Union enjoys the right to manage its local affairs consistent with the laws of the land.
The DC Statehood Toolkit is designed for citizens across the country to learn more about the District of Columbia and why DC Statehood matters to the residents of our nation’s capital.

The Toolkit is a joint project of the League of Women Voters Education Fund and the League of Women Voters of the District of Columbia thanks to a generous grant from the government of the District of Columbia.