Frequently Asked Questions about Statehood for the People of DC

Why do residents of Washington, DC want Statehood?

The people of Washington, DC deserve the same rights that the people in the 50 states enjoy. District residents are required to fulfill all the obligations of U.S. citizenship—paying taxes, voting, and serving on juries and in the military. Yet for over 200 years, we have been denied a voice in our national government and sovereignty over our local affairs. Admitting the residential and commercial parts of DC as a state will at last give us representation in Congress and control over our state and local government.

How will Statehood be achieved?

Statehood will be achieved by the House and Senate passing and the President signing legislation admitting the new state. Statehood legislation, which requires a simple majority vote and cannot be repealed, is the way that every state, except for the original 13, became part of the United States. The people of the District of Columbia have voted in support of statehood, have approved a state constitution, a representative form of government, and the proposed boundaries. The next step is Congressional passage of statehood legislation such as the Washington, D.C. Admission Act, which has been introduced in the 117th Congress.

Wouldn’t it make more sense for DC to join neighboring Maryland or Virginia?

The District of Columbia has been separate from Maryland and Virginia for over 200 years. While DC, Maryland, and Virginia work cooperatively on many regional issues, neither Maryland nor Virginia residents are interested in annexing the District of Columbia. Likewise, DC residents prefer the full autonomy that only Statehood can provide. States must consent to any changes in their boundaries. Fourteen Members of Congress from Maryland and Virginia are sponsoring the Admission Act in the 117th Congress.

Isn’t DC already represented in the US Congress by Eleanor Holmes Norton?

Yes and no. DC’s Delegate in the US House of Representatives (currently Eleanor Holmes Norton) can sit on and vote in Committees, can introduce legislation, and can participate in legislative debates, but she cannot vote on bills being considered by the full House. DC has no representation in the US Senate.

Is it Constitutional for the federal district to be reduced in size, and the residential and commercial portions of DC to become a State?
Yes. Article I. Section 8 of the Constitution sets only a maximum size ("...not exceeding ten Miles square...") for the federal "Seat of the Government of the United States". Congress has the authority to redefine the borders of the federal district. (Congress did so, for instance, in 1846, when a portion of the original territory of the District of Columbia west of the Potomac River was retroceded to Virginia.)

If DC becomes the 51st State, what will happen to the federal seat of government, monuments and museums?

This area is unpopulated, will be clearly mapped, and will remain in place under federal jurisdiction. Only the residential and commercial areas of the District of Columbia will be part of the new 51st State. Of course, these areas include some federal properties that will continue to function just as all federal properties do in the 50 states.

Can DC afford to be a State?

Yes. Washington, DC now operates as if it were a State, and its vibrant urban economy has a bigger gross domestic product than many States. DC pays over $27 billion/year in federal taxes – more than many states. DC has balanced its budgets year-after-year for over 20 years and now enjoys a credit rating that is the envy of jurisdictions across the country. Local taxes, not federal dollars, constitute the vast majority of the District’s budget. "There is no longer any reason to worry that the District would not be a fiscally viable state," according to Alice Rivlin, former head of the White House Office of Management and Budget, former Vice Chair of the Federal Reserve Board, and former head of the District of Columbia Financial Responsibility and Management Assistance Authority, which delivered the city to financial stability.

Isn’t DC too small to be a State?

No. The population of the District of Columbia is more than 700,000 -- more than the States of Wyoming and Vermont and on par with six other states. In any case, there are no population or geographic size criteria for Statehood in the US Constitution.

Where do things now stand with DC’s quest to become the 51st State?

In 2020, the U.S. House of Representatives took the historic step of passing the Washington, D.C. Admission Act (H.R. 51) with 232 votes. H.R. 51 and S. 51 have been introduced in the 117th Congress, both with record co-sponsorship. We look to build on this momentum, pass the legislation, and get it signed into law. To do that will require the support of Americans from DC and across the country, the support of a majority in the US Congress, and the support of the President.
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 League of Women Voters of the District of Columbia thanks to a generous grant from the government of the District of Columbia.