June 25, 2020

Statement of the Rural Advancement Fund of the National Sharecroppers Fund, the Rural Coalition, and our Members and Allies to D.C. Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton and the People of the District of Columbia in Support of DC Statehood

We the undersigned rural community organizations from across this nation stand with you and the people of the District of Columbia in strong support of HR 51, the Washington, DC Admissions Act, and the immediate extension of full voting rights and representation to the citizens of the District of Columbia. We urge all members of the House of Representatives to cast their votes in favor of HR 51, exercising a franchise not yet granted to you on behalf of the citizens of DC.

Statehood for DC is not just a local matter. The undersigned include many members and allies of the Rural Coalition who have benefited from Rural Coalition's over 40-year history in the District of Columbia, where we and thousands of other national organizations have been founded, incorporated and/or located. The staff and members of these organizations, who live and work in DC, contribute immeasurably to assuring the voices of every community in the nation are woven into the statutes debated and shaped here. Yet if our staff and leaders choose to live here, it is at the cost of their own franchise. We are all poorer for the lack of the full voice of DC in our national governance.

Through our own roots in civil, indigenous, voting rights and farmworker movements, we further support DC Statehood to honor the deep connections between DC and rural communities everywhere. Former DC Council Chair John A. Wilson, a veteran of the civil rights movement, came to Washington, DC to serve for 6 years as legislative director of the National Sharecroppers Fund, a founding member of the Rural Coalition. He forfeited his own representation to represent disenfranchised rural communities, leading advocacy for the tenant farmers and migrant farm workers NSF represented. As DC well knows, from there he stepped up as a leader of the historic campaign to secure the Home Rule Charter for the District of Columbia in 1974, which established the elected DC Council, where he went on to serve as a member and Chair.

Chairman Wilson also supported the founding of the Rural Coalition in 1978, and with Rural Advancement Fund of the National Sharecroppers Fund, the Federation of Southern Cooperatives Land Assistance Fund and others contributed to our own organization’s foundational principles. These principles rest on our belief that the democratic participation of all is essential to the governance of our communities, our states and our nation by engaged citizens who guide the development of their societies for all who reside within their borders. We today remain deeply linked with DC and all urban communities through our foundational work for a just and resilient food and agriculture system with food sovereignty for all in it as our guiding principle.

We urge members of Congress to vote for statehood for the District of Columbia because it is the only way to secure full and equal voting rights for the people of DC and their engagement in building our shared future as a nation. We support DC Statehood based on our adherence to the founding beliefs of this nation, that all people are endowed with inalienable rights and that to secure these rights, governments are instituted, deriving their just powers from the consent of
the governed. We support DC Statehood to end the abridgement of the rights of the residents of the District of Columbia when the U.S. Congress imposes its will on local matters while also denying them their own sovereignty over their governance as well as voting representation on federal issues in both houses of the U.S. Congress.

As organizations representing disenfranchised communities across the nation who, with the support of many leaders and residents of DC, have long struggled to secure voting rights and the real and full representation of all their citizens, we stand now with the people of the District of Columbia. We continue to urge the Congress to complete unfinished work to assure real sovereignty and representation by overcoming all barriers to the full and equal voting rights for all citizens of this nation. Through DC Statehood, we believe the citizens of DC will with vigilance continue to elect as their Representative and two Senators persons with an abiding understanding of the importance of equal representation under the law.

And because only through statehood can the residents of the District of Columbia enjoy full rights in state and local matters and voting representation in both houses of the U.S. Congress just like every other citizen of the United States of America, we therefore urge all members of Congress as matter of simple justice to support and vote for HR 51 and grant the people of Washington, D.C. the full rights of American citizenship by making the residential and commercial areas of the District of Columbia the 51st State, while preserving a smaller federal district as our nation’s capital.

For more information please contact Rural Coalition Chairperson, jzippert@aol.com or Executive Director, lpicciano@ruralco.org

In Solidarity and Cooperation

Rural Advancement Fund of the National Sharecroppers Fund, Orangeburg, SC
Federation of Southern Cooperatives/Land Assistance Fund
Rural Coalition/Coalición Rural, Washington DC
and
21st Century Youth Leadership Movement, Selma, AL
AFGE Local 3354, St. Louis, MO
Alabama Association of Cooperatives
Alianza Nacional de Campesinas, Oxnard, CA
American Indian Movement, Minneapolis, MN
Black Farmers and Ranchers of NM
Border Agricultural Workers Project, El Paso, TX
Concerned Citizens of Tillery, NC
Cottage House, Inc., Ariton, AL
Family Farm Defenders, Madison, WI
Farmworker Association of Florida
Friends of the Earth, Washington, DC
Grupo Amor de Homestead, FL
Hempstead Project Heart, WI
Kansas Black Farmers Association, Bogue, KS
Latino Farmers of the Southeast, Apopka, FL
Mississippi Association of Cooperatives
National Latino Farmers and Ranchers Trade Association, Washington, DC
National Immigrant Farmers Association, Inc., El Paso, TX
North Carolina Association of Black Lawyers Land Loss Prevention Project, Durham, NC
Oklahoma Black Historical Research Project, Inc.
Operation Spring Plant, Oxford, NC
Rural Development Leadership Network, New York, NY
Three Fires Spiritual and Cultural Education Society, Minneapolis, MN
World Farmers, Lancaster, MA

Cc: The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
    The Honorable Kevin McCarthy

Cc: All Members of the House of Representatives