



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Prominent Organizations Are Speaking Out In Support Of The
“Vote NO on Initiative 83” Initiative Recall Campaign**

Supporters are ready to take action to prevent Initiative 83 from being on the November 2024 ballot.

Voters are saying NO to ranked choice voting and semi-closed primaries in the District of Columbia

*****Campaign Staff Are Available for Interview & B-Roll *****

WASHINGTON, DC – On December 12, 2023, in response to the outcry of local, long standing leaders of organizations and civic groups in the District of Columbia to the direct attack on the Democrat’s Vote, the Home Rule Act and DC Statehood efforts an Initiative Recall Committee, Vote NO on Initiative 83, was registered with the District of Columbia Office of Campaign Finance. The goal of the recall initiative committee is to prevent Initiative 83 from being successful by educating registered Democratic voters about this initiative’s potential to have destructive and long-term negative effects on the residents of the District of Columbia. The committee will also be monitoring and questioning Democratic elected officials and candidates to determine if they will support and protect the Democratic Party values.

Deirdre Brown, Chair of Vote NO on Initiative 83 states that “The recall initiative committee has received overwhelming support from leaders of District of Columbia based organizations who represent the interest of women, children, seniors, and Democrats in the District.” Below are just a few statements of support:

“The Metropolitan Women’s Democratic Club (“MWDC”) has stood against Ranked Choice Voting for years and are opposed to allowing Independent voters to vote in the Democratic Primary” says **Gaby L. Fraser, President of MWDC**. “Closed primaries provide a safeguard against potential interference from individuals who do not share the Democratic party’s values. This is a direct attempt by special interest groups to dilute and destroy the Democratic vote in the District and violates the Home Rule Act.”

Anita Bellamy Shelton, President of DC Women in Politics (“DCWIP”), a non-partisan group that supports women candidates run and win elections in the District of Columbia, states that “DCWIP is in support of the Vote NO on Initiative 83 campaign to stop Initiative 83 from being on the November 2024 ballot. DCWIP is intensifying its efforts with women and civic organizations to educate the public on the negative effects of Ranked Choice Voting on seniors, those who are language challenged and persons with disability. DCWIP has been working for over two years to stop Ranked Choice Voting from coming to the District of Columbia.”

Celeste Garcia, President of the DC Federation of Democratic Women (“DCFDW”) says that “Over the years our current system has yielded a diverse City Council which included Republicans, members of the LGBTQ community, and female members. If there is a concern about Council Members being elected with less than 50 percent of the vote, we should explore various options, such as run-offs, to determine the most effective way to address that problem rather than upend the electoral process. The proposed changes would be costly in an already tight fiscal

environment. Additionally, the DCFDW thinks residents must be educated about the pros and cons of Initiative 83 and the existing process before they are forced to make a decision.”

“Semi-closed primaries are comparable to political gentrification and are a subtle form of voter suppression” says **Valca Valentine, President of the DC Democratic Women’s Club**. The DC Democratic Women’s Club has historically raised political awareness and built capacity among voters. “We are on a path to educate voters, candidates, and elected officials that this initiative is a potential threat to the Home Rule Act.”

Alfred Swailes, President of the Black Business Task Force, a non-partisan organization that advocates to unite, empower and grow DC black owned businesses expressed concerns that Initiative 83 may undermined DC Statehood efforts, noting that “Statehood for DC could significantly benefit the local economy by enhancing its appeal to businesses and residents. Currently, DC-based business owners and employees lack voting representation in Congress, depriving them of a voice in legislation that directly influences the local business environment. We stand in opposition to Initiative 83.”

Hazel Thomas, Ward 5 Democratic State Committeewoman questions and states “Why should approximately 71,000 Independent voters with no party affiliation and no discernible platform be able to alter the will of over 500,000 voters in the DC Democratic party? We cannot allow the Democratic vote to be diluted and destroyed.”

Myths & Facts About Initiative 83

Vote NO on Initiative 83 with the support of local organizations and civic associations is launching an intensive education campaign to provide Democratic voters the facts about ranked choice voting and semi-closed primaries. Make All Votes Count DC has promoted common myths and misconceptions that will be debunked:

MYTH: Make All Votes Count DC claims that closed primaries disenfranchise non-party affiliated, independent voters.

FACT: Eligible voters are never barred from joining the Democratic Party. All registered and eligible voters can vote in a general election regardless of party affiliation. Title IV of the DC Home Rule Act inherently guarantees the right of District voters and political parties to associate together to achieve their political goals. The DC Home Rule Act specifically states that the Mayor¹, Councilmembers², and Attorney General³ be elected on a “partisan” basis. Independent voters have made a choice not to affiliate with a party. It is not a legitimate argument that closed primaries disenfranchise any registered and eligible voter. **In fact, semi-closed primaries are a direct attempt to suppress the Democratic voting rights in the District of Columbia guaranteed by the Home Rule Act.** Requiring that a voter be a party member to vote in a closed primary is not disenfranchisement — it is freedom of association.

MYTH: Make All Votes Count DC has asserted that the majority of District of Columbia voters support ranked choice voting and opening the primaries to Independent voters.

FACT: Based on the August 1, 2023, DCBOE voter registration statistic, there are 405,391 registered Democratic voters in the District of Columbia. Many of them are represented by long standing District of Columbia organizations and civic associations that have taken a general body vote of its members in opposition to ranked choice voting, semi-closed primaries, and/or Initiative 83. Attorney Johnny Barnes, on behalf of the Democratic State Committee, filed a Complaint in Opposition to Initiative 83 in the Superior Court of the District of Columbia (2023-CAB-0005414) arguing in part that the initiative violated the Home Rule Act, the Constitution and the DC Human Rights Act.

¹ D.C. Code § 1-204.21(b) “The Mayor, established by subsection (a) of this section, shall be elected, on a partisan basis, for a term of 4 years beginning at noon on January 2nd of the year following his election.”

² D.C. Code § 1-204.01(b)(1) “The Council established under subsection (a) of this section shall consist of 13 members elected on a partisan basis.”

³ D.C. Code § 1-204.35(a) “The Attorney General for the District of Columbia shall be elected on a partisan basis by the registered qualified electors of the District.”

MYTH: Make All Votes Count DC presents itself as a grassroots District of Columbia organization.

FACT: Make All Votes Count DC are using locals as the face of their campaign, however, **their efforts are engineered and fueled by national special interest groups and dark money.** The two national organizations, Open Primaries and Fair Vote , are behind the Make All Votes Count DC campaign. Both organizations are not District of Columbia organizations but represent outside special interest groups trying to influence DC politics.

MYTH: Make All Votes Count DC in their recent press release from January 10, 2024, argued that ranked choice voting will “protect the Black vote” and “help elect more women and people of color.”⁴

FACT: Electing women of color and people of color is not an issue in the District of Columbia. The Council of the District of Columbia is the most diverse elected council in the metropolitan area and perhaps in the nation. District voters have and will continue to vote women and people of color into office who share their values. Ranked choice voting and open primaries if adopted will reverse the gender and racial make-up of the District’s elected officials.

MYTH: Make All Votes Count DC argues that ranked choice voting is widely being adopted nationwide.

FACT: An analysis of the trends throughout the nation indicated that the reverse may be true. **Jurisdictions are either rescinding or have abandoned ranked choice voting.** Ranked choice voting is banned in South Dakota, Idaho, Tennessee, Florida, and Montana. In November 2023, during the general elections, the County Board of our southern neighbors in Arlington, Virginia decided against using ranked choice voting. This decision followed their experimentation with ranked choice voting during the Democratic Primary in June 2023. The County Board cited confusion about the process and its negative effects on minority voters.⁵

MYTH: Make All Votes Count DC published materials state that “Ranking preserves Native Washingtonian voting power...”

FACT: This attack on grassroots DC Statehood efforts will have a negative effect on the ongoing fight for DC Statehood. Historically, most opposition to DC statehood is partisan and is based in the fear of the political voting power of Wards 7, 8 and 5. In 1978, Senator Ted Kennedy (D-MA) commented that the resistance to granting the District of Columbia full representation was due to “the fear that Senators elected from the District of Columbia may be too liberal, too urban, too Black or too Democratic.”⁶ The House Majority Leader Steve Scalise (R-LA) recently drafted a memo in response to H.R. 51, the D.C. Admission Act, with the central argument against DC Statehood being that “it is nothing more than a partisan power grab from Speaker Pelosi and her socialist allies to add two more Democrats to the Senate.”⁷ “Initiative 83 will destroy Democracy and the Democratic Party in the District of Columbia and hamper DC Statehood efforts.” Says Deirdre Brown, Chair of the Vote NO on Initiative 83.

The Chair of the committee is Deirdre Brown, former ANC Commission, current Ward 3 Democratic Party Precinct Delegate and a housing and legislative advocate. The Treasurer is Neena Murphy Martin United States Air Force Veteran and civic engagement leader in the District of Columbia.

For more information about the Vote NO on Initiative 83 campaign visits: www.VoteNo83.com

Paid for by Vote No on Initiative 83 | Neena Murphy Martin, Treasurer | Deirdre Brown, Chair | 14 Ridge Square, NW, 3rd Floor, Washington, DC 20016. A copy of our report is filed with the Director of Campaign Finance of the District of Columbia Board of Elections.

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⁴ <https://makeallvotescountdc.org/press-release-campaign-adopt-initiative-83-petition/>

⁵ <https://www.virginiamercury.com/2023/07/18/after-being-first-in-virginia-to-use-it-arlington-hits-brakes-on-ranked-choice-voting/>

⁶ <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/dc-statehood-explained>

⁷ <https://cc.org/dems-push-for-d-c-statehood-is-an-unconstitutional-power-grab/>