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House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-1501

Statement of Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton
Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee
“Equality for the District of Columbia:
Discussing the Implications of S. 132, the New Columbia Admission Act”
September 15, 2014

Chairman Carper, Ranking Member Coburn, members of the Committee, I appreciate the opportunity to testify before you at today’s hearing. Your hearing is the leading indicator of the unusual progress the District of Columbia has now made in advancing D.C. statehood, including its individual components.

Chairman Carper, let me begin by thanking you for taking energetic leadership, even as a new chair of this Committee, in assisting the District of Columbia in many significant ways and particularly for holding a hearing that is justifiably called historic because it is the first Senate hearing on statehood for the District. We especially appreciate your early initiative in introducing the New Columbia Admission Act, and for setting the record for the most cosponsors for the bill since it was first introduced in the Senate, in 1984, before either you or I was in Congress. With your leadership, the top four Democratic leaders are among the cosponsors of the bill, led by Majority Leader Harry Reid, who, as majority leader, generally does not cosponsor bills. Your hearing also has enabled us to break the record for cosponsors in the House, at 106, more than it has ever had since it was first introduced in the House, in 1983, by my predecessor, Congressman Walter Fauntroy. To complement this unprecedented growth in congressional support, President Obama endorsed D.C. statehood in July.

Our residents are grateful for today’s hearing even though they doubt statehood will come tomorrow. The considerable appreciation in the District for this hearing comes because residents know that a hearing is a significant and necessary step in putting an issue on the congressional agenda. Your hearing is the most important vehicle afforded by Congress to educate Members and the public and to signal that the matter constitutes a serious national concern that should move to passage. At the same time, the city’s elected officials and residents are well aware that your willingness to hold a hearing carries a reciprocal responsibility for all of us who live in the District to continue to build support for the bill in Congress and with the public. We need friends in the Senate and House, but residents learned many lessons from their experience in achieving home rule just 40 years ago. Although Democrats were in power for most of the 100 years after Congress eliminated D.C.’s limited home rule after Reconstruction, home rule did not return until there was collective action from residents. For that reason, I particularly appreciate the rapidly growing number of D.C. statehood activists and their help in gathering cosponsors for the bill.

You will be hearing from a distinguished and expert set of witnesses about every aspect of statehood and the effects of its denial. Therefore, I believe that my best contribution would be to speak from the unique vantage point of the Member who represents the District of Columbia in Congress, which allows me to give context to why we requested this hearing and believe that it is particularly timely.

Neither the historically unproductive Congress in recent years nor the fact that I have been in the minority for most of my service has discouraged us from believing that statehood is both indispensable and achievable. During this same period, with support from residents and Members of Congress, we have made bipartisan progress on the major elements of statehood, while continuing to press for statehood itself as the only remedy that affords equal citizenship rights. Nevertheless, as Members of Congress continue to accept and move on the major components of statehood, statehood itself should become clearer as a logical and appropriate result.

Recently, for example, D.C. budget and legislative autonomy and anti-shutdown legislation have all moved further than at any time since the Home Rule Act of 1973. The President put both budget and legislative autonomy in his fiscal year 2015 budget, the first time both have been in a president's budget. The Republican chairman of the House committee with D.C. jurisdiction, Representative Darrell Issa, held a hearing last Congress on the local D.C. budget, and after hearing the Republican and Democratic witnesses all testify that D.C.'s financial condition, reserves and growth were among the best in the nation, endorsed budget autonomy, and has worked tirelessly with local officials and me as well as Republican interest groups to secure budget autonomy. The House Majority Leader, Eric Cantor, last Congress endorsed budget autonomy. The D.C. Appropriations bill enacted for the current fiscal year prevents the D.C. government from shutting down in the event of a federal government shutdown during the next fiscal year, marking the first time the D.C. government will be spared from the threat of a shutdown for an entire fiscal year. The House-passed D.C. Appropriations bill for the next fiscal year would also prevent the D.C. government from shutting down for the following fiscal year. At the same time, progress in the Senate also has been particularly rapid and steady. The pending Senate D.C. Appropriations bill would grant D.C. both budget and legislative autonomy, the first appropriations bill ever to do so, and would permanently prevent shutdowns. Both our budget and legislative autonomy bills are now pending for the first time ever in the Senate. As Congress sees the importance of these components of statehood, the logic of statehood itself becomes more apparent. While insisting on statehood, residents also have supported these components because they want any and all their rights now, in any way they can get them, and because they understand that these are steps toward statehood itself.

However, because progress in obtaining the various components of statehood does not automatically yield statehood itself, we have simultaneously continued to introduce our statehood bill. Your panel of expert witnesses will offer details that show that there are no financial, economic, constitutional or historical reasons that the 650,000 Americans who live in the District of Columbia should not be granted statehood.

They will show how the District's local economy has become one of the strongest in the nation – its \$12.5 billion budget, larger than the budgets of 12 states; its \$1.75 billion surplus, the envy of the states; its per capita personal income, higher than that of any state; its total personal income, higher than that of seven states; its per capita personal consumption expenditures, higher than those of any state; and its total personal consumption expenditures, greater than those of seven states. They will detail D.C.'s population growth rate, among the highest in the nation -- an almost 50,000 increase since the 2010 Census, giving the District a larger population than Wyoming and Vermont, and putting it in the league with the seven states that have a population under one million.

You will hear the many reasons why statehood is necessary for D.C. residents. As the District's elected representative to Congress, many of those reasons hit me in the face every day. I feel it when the bell rings for votes on bills, and I cannot cast a vote for the 650,000 American citizens who live in the District, despite the \$12,000 per resident they pay in federal taxes, more per capita than any other Americans. I will feel it this week when I go to the floor to debate our country's military engagement to stop the advance of ISIL. I have gone to the floor to debate our entry into every war since becoming a Member of the House. The purple fingers in Iraq and Afghanistan signaled that our country had given them votes in their national legislature. Our D.C. servicemembers fought and died in those wars, but the veterans came home without the same rights themselves, just as our residents did during all the 20th century wars, when D.C. casualties were disproportionate, particularly in Vietnam, when there were more D.C. casualties than from 10 states.

You will hear expert testimony that shows that Congress has the authority to make New Columbia a state because of its Article IV, Section 3, Clause 1 power to admit new states to the Union, combined with its Article I, Section 8, Clause 17 power over the seat of the federal government.

I believe that when this hearing is over, this Committee will understand that the accident of history in Philadelphia that led the Framers in the 18th century to create a nation's capital under federal control is today an embarrassing anachronism, recently found for the second time to be a violation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which the United States is a signatory. Congress can preserve federal control over the core national capital area and make hometown District of Columbia the 51st state. It is impossible to lay to the framers of our Constitution, who went to war on the slogan of no taxation without representation, the intent to leave any Americans without the rights of others in the Union or without the local control the Framers believed was central to democratic government.

Ever since the creation of the capital, the District of Columbia has been an outlier, integral to the nation yet needlessly divorced from its core democratic principles. Enormous change has come to the nation and to the District over the 224 years since the city became the official capital and hometown to its first residents. My own family has lived through more than 150 years of these changes, ever since my great-grandfather, Richard Holmes, as a slave, walked away from a plantation in Virginia and made his way to the District. This city has been transformed from a sleepy Southern city, where three generations of the Holmes family went to segregated schools, as required by the Congress of the United States, to one of the nation's most

cosmopolitan and vibrant places to live. Today's District of Columbia is no less than the equal of the states.

In short, everything about the District of Columbia has changed except its status as a second-class stepchild within a union of states. As the growing statehood movement attests, residents are fed up with the chasm between national democratic rhetoric and local undemocratic practices.

In the 21st century, Congress simply cannot ask our residents to continue to be voyeurs of democracy, as Congress votes on matters that affect them -- how much in federal taxes they must pay, whether their sons and daughters will go to war, and even their local budget and laws -- without the vote in the House and Senate required for consent of the governed.

Congress has two choices. It can continue to exercise autocratic authority over the American citizens who reside in the District of Columbia, treating them, in the words of Frederick Douglass, as "aliens, not citizens, but subjects." Or it can live up to this nation's promise and ideals and pass the New Columbia Admission Act.