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ACLU OF RI POSITION: SUPPORT

TESTIMONY ON 23-H 5515, HOUSE RESOLUTION SUPPORTING FEDERAL LEGISLATION GRANTING STATEHOOD TO THE PEOPLE OF WASHINGTON, D.C. March 6, 2022

The ACLU of RI appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony in favor of this resolution which would support federal action granting statehood status to Washington, D.C. Those who live in Washington, D.C. are the only citizens in the democratic world who live in a national capital and do not have equal voting and representation rights. This voter suppression is antiquated, racially discriminatory, and must be rectified by granting statehood to these voters.

D.C. statehood is not only an issue of representation, but an issue of residential autonomy. D.C. does not control its own laws or its own criminal justice system. Unlike every other state, D.C. cannot pass its own laws without “congressional review,” which Congress has repeatedly used to block the will of the people in D.C. Though this suppression is harmful to D.C. residents on its own, Congress has the further ability to create its own laws for D.C. residents without input from the residents themselves, which often happens through forced “riders” on D.C.’s annual budget. In just one example of the inappropriate control that Congress wields over D.C., in 1998 Congress blocked D.C. from using its own funds to pay for an HIV/needle exchange program, stalling the program for over a decade and costing some D.C. residents their lives.

Additionally, D.C. already operates with the realities of statehood but without the same representation or rights afforded to all other states. In fact, D.C. residents pay the *highest* per-capita federal income taxes in the entire country, and pay *more* in federal income tax than the residents of 22 other states.

In keeping with the tenets of civil rights, equity, and democratic representation, it is critical that D.C. be granted statehood. We urge the passage of this resolution which would importantly signify our state’s solidarity in the campaign for Washington, D.C. statehood.

Thank you for your consideration.