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**Statement of the District of Columbia Affairs Community
of the D.C. Bar Communities on
H.R. 1089 (Bringing Oversight to Washington and Safety to Every Resident Act)**

The District of Columbia Affairs Community of the D.C. Bar Communities (the “Community”) urges both Congress and the Trump Administration to respect the full and equal citizenship rights of District of Columbia residents through budget and legislative autonomy, and full Home Rule. Simply put, the residents of the District have the right to self-governance and threats to interfere with that right are unwarranted, unjust, and un-American.

The Community serves all attorneys who live, work, or have interest in the District of Columbia, and Bar members who practice before or work with the D.C. Council and the Executive Branch or the court system. The Community monitors legislative, judicial, and related legal developments affecting the District. Statehood and Home Rule issues fall within the Community’s special expertise and the Community (and its predecessor the District of Columbia Affairs Section) has long advocated for the District’s autonomy on all fronts.¹

The Community joins residents across the District—and across the country—in expressing deep concern over recent proposals from the current Congress and Administration to curtail or eliminate self-governance for the residents of the nation’s capital. This includes proposals to eliminate the rights of District residents to select a Mayor, Councilmembers, and Advisory Neighborhood Commissioners of our own choosing, and the right to fashion a municipal budget—75% of which

¹ See, e.g., Community’s comments on General Government Fiscal Year 2024 Appropriations Bill (https://www.dcbar.org/getmedia/110b35a5-070a-4454-a3bf-721d23dfbeb2/Statement-of-the-District-of-Columbia-Affairs-Community-of-the-District-of-Columbia-Bar-on-FY-2024-Appropriations_1); Community’s Supreme Court *amicus* brief, in support of petitioners Angelica Castañon, et al. (<https://www.dcbar.org/getmedia/19450d8c-6676-4348-8f3c-3e33297a5a69/20-1279-Br-or-Legal-Organization-and-Legal-Professional-Amici-in-Support-of-PL-Castanon-v-US>); and Section’s comments in support of H.R. 2472/S. 1267, the “D.C. Budget Autonomy Act of 2003” (letter to the Honorable Dennis Hastert, Speaker of the House, February 2004, <https://www.dcbar.org/getmedia/cc57d0c8-4555-4b72-9e19-74ce7a0a1179/2003-Support-of-Budget-Autonomy-Act-of-2003>).



consists of local dollars²—to address the needs of our own residents. For example, the “Bringing Oversight to Washington and Safety to Every Resident” Act (so named because the acronym spells out our current Mayor’s last name BOWSER) would repeal the Home Rule Act, but would not implement any local governance in its place. The BOWSER Act would strip the District of all of its elected representatives at every level. These proposals are rooted in the colonialist mentality of the British Tea Act of 1773, and in the history of the District prior to the D.C. Home Rule Act of 1973.

This Community categorically opposes all proposals that would diminish the powers of elected local government in the District. While specifics vary, all of these efforts defy the self-evident truth emblazoned in the Declaration of Independence—governments derive their “just Powers from the Consent of the Governed.” Indeed, when discussing the Constitution’s federal enclave clause in Federalist 43, James Madison reiterated that self-evident truth when he said “... a municipal legislature for local purposes, derived from their own suffrages, will *of course* be allowed them.” (emphasis added).

As a matter of justice, legitimacy, and historical experience, the District cannot be capably governed by a person or a body that is not accountable to District voters.

The denial of full and equal citizenship rights at the federal level for District residents puts us at odds with this nation’s self-proclaimed role as a beacon of democracy for the world. Since 2015 the District has been one of over 45 members of the “Unrepresented Nations and Peoples’ Organization” (UNPO); while several members have left the UNPO over the years because they have gained representation (*e.g.*, Armenia, Estonia, and Latvia), the District has remained either unrepresented or underrepresented since it first became the nation’s capital in 1790. The lack of a voting representative in Congress weakens the First Amendment rights of our residents to petition the government to redress grievances. Other than felons in some states, District residents are the only adult American citizens subject to federal income taxes who have no voting representative in Congress and no say in how our federal tax dollars are spent. As if that were not bad enough, District residents must also secure Congressional approval when it comes to how—and even whether³—to spend local tax revenue.

² As of publication, the Continuing Resolution on Federal Appropriations for Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 requires DC to revert to FY 2024 spending levels midway through its current FY 2025 budget. As a result, DC will be forced to cut more than \$1 billion from its current budget. These cuts would primarily come from local tax revenues and would not have a significant impact on federal funds or achieve meaningful federal tax dollar savings.

³ See, *e.g.*, Norton Files Amendments to CR to Prevent Fiscal Sabotage of D.C. (<https://norton.house.gov/media/press-releases/norton-files-amendments-cr-prevent-fiscal-sabotage-dc>).



Recently, District leaders have had to scramble to respond to repeated federal intrusions into the District’s governance, including the introduction of a measure to repeal the limited Home Rule that the District has enjoyed for the past 50 years,⁴ and an executive order meddling in local affairs.⁵ Responding to these proposals unnecessarily distracts District leaders from effectively governing, including addressing the serious fiscal challenge posed by the unprecedented firings of federal workers—a significant part of the District’s tax base. For 30 years running, the District has balanced its budget and its credit rating consistently ranks among the top 20% of the nation’s cities and “states.” The District will continue to be a leader in this regard; however, the federal government must stop compounding the fiscal challenges the District is already facing and must stop interfering with the District’s ability to solve problems by manufacturing new ones.

Instead, the Community strongly urges Congress and the Administration to recommit itself to the District’s right to self-governance and to work *with* District leaders to make the nation’s capital city an even greater place.

This statement was approved by the D.C. Affairs Community’s Steering Committee by a unanimous vote of its elected members on March 20, 2025. For further information please contact: Community Steering Committee Chair and public statements representative Austin A.B. Ownbey, Esq. at Austin.Ownbey@Akerman.com.

⁴ HR 1089 & S. 4695, the BOWSER Act simply states “Effective on the date that is 1 year after the date of enactment of this Act, the District of Columbia Home Rule Act (Public Law 93–198; 87 Stat. 774) is repealed.” The Statement of Purpose of the Home Rule Act states, among other things, that the purpose of Home Rule was to “relieve Congress of the burden of legislating upon essentially local District matters.” The BOWSER Act would put that burden back on Congress.

⁵ Executive Order issued on March 28, 2025 titled Making the District Of Columbia Safe and Beautiful, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/03/making-the-district-of-columbia-safe-and-beautiful/>. The Executive Order creates the D.C. Safe and Beautiful Task Force that includes numerous federal officials, but does not include a single representative from the District or anyone who is accountable to District voters.