

# AN OPEN LETTER TO CONGRESS: D.C STATEHOOD IS AN ISSUE OF PUBLIC HEALTH, RACIAL EQUITY

Washington, D.C.'s more than 712,000 residents pay federal taxes, serve in the armed forces, and outnumber the residents of Wyoming or Vermont. Yet, because the District is not a state, Washingtonians are denied the right to representation in Congress. They have no vote on the federal laws and policies that shape their lives. Instead, lawmakers who do not represent Washingtonians use the District's lack of statehood to play politics with residents' livelihoods, and with their health.

[Nearly half of District residents are Black.](#) If Washington finally became a state, it would be the first state with a plurality of Black residents. Statehood for the District of Columbia is a racial justice issue — and it's a public health imperative.

As the country works to distribute vaccines and end the COVID-19 pandemic — which has devastated Black and Latino communities with higher infection rates, death rates, and job losses — the District's lack of autonomy has put residents' health at risk. Large proportions of D.C.'s vaccine allotment has gone [to federal agencies and to non-residents](#) while Black residents are going without. While D.C.'s Black residents have accounted for nearly half of COVID-19 cases and nearly 70% of deaths, they've received [only 37% of vaccines](#).

This is not new: Congress passes annual legislation prohibiting D.C. from using locally-raised tax dollars to cover abortion care for people enrolled in Medicaid, forcing many to pay out-of-pocket for this essential health care service. Because of centuries of systemic racism, people who use Medicaid are disproportionately people of color — this D.C. Medicaid policy is part of the long history of denying Black and Brown people and immigrant communities autonomy over their reproductive health.

And reproductive health care in the District is in crisis: While [white D.C. residents](#) have a maternal mortality rate of almost zero, Black residents suffer a maternal mortality rate so high that the District has the [fifth worst overall](#) rate in the country — more than 50% higher than the national average.

It has always been morally reprehensible to deny the people of Washington, D.C. representation in our democracy. But the triple intersecting crises of COVID-19, systemic racism, and attacks on reproductive health have laid bare the depth of inequity experienced by D.C residents, particularly those of color. People who live in Washington, D.C. are being denied the autonomy to build their own health care systems and make their own choices about their bodies. This is a matter of life and death.

We applaud the U.S. House of Representatives for passing H.R. 51: Washington, D.C. Admission Act. Now the U.S. Senate must immediately take up and pass the bill and admit the District as the 51<sup>st</sup> state.

Sincerely,

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*Dr. Serina Floyd, Vice President of Medical Affairs/Medical Director, Planned Parenthood of Metropolitan Washington, DC*  
*U.S. Rep. Lauren Underwood (IL-14)*  
*Akosua Ali, President, NAACP Washington, DC Branch*

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