



June 3, 2019

Senate Committee on Appropriations
The Capitol, Room S-128
Washington, DC 20510

House Committee on Appropriations
The Capitol, Room H-307
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator or Representative:

We, the undersigned organizations, urge the Appropriations Committees to maintain the District of Columbia FY 2020 Appropriations Bill as introduced. The bill, introduced last night, respects self-governance of the District of Columbia and maintains local control for the residents of Washington, DC.

Should the bill be amended, we are concerned that the FY'20 Spending Bill will, yet again, attempt to undermine local decisions made by the people of the District of Columbia and their locally elected leadership. These local laws were enacted to address concerns that are important to the more than 700,000 residents who call Washington, DC home. When Congress attempts to impose legislative "riders," they seek to overturn the work of our locally elected officials and ignore the voices of our neighbors. Such riders would have a grave impact on criminal justice reform, local budget control, gun violence prevention, end-of-life medical decisions, and reproductive freedom. These riders usurp the autonomy granted to the District and our elected mayor and council and overstep the original intent of both the creation of the District and the Home Rule Act.

We understand that some in Congress are still seeking to use the appropriations process to impose policy riders upon the people of the District. The undersigned organizations, collectively representing millions of Americans, advocate on diverse issues and are united in our opposition to the inclusion of any language in the appropriations bill that overrides, limits, or otherwise usurps local government decision-making by the District of Columbia.

We also urge Congress to refrain from taking action that could threaten the District's Local Budget Autonomy Act. The Act allows the District to spend local tax dollars based on the local budget at the beginning of each fiscal year. The DC Superior Court has held that the Autonomy Act is valid and the DC Council and the Mayor of the District are proceeding with the FY'20 local budget in accordance with the law.

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Previous appropriations bills have included a provision barring the District from using local funds to provide insurance coverage of abortion care for individuals enrolled in the Medicaid program. While the Hyde Amendment currently restricts the federal funding for abortion care, states are able to use their own funds to cover abortion care for low income individuals. D.C. is the only locality that is restricted by Congress from using its own local funds to ensure equal access to abortion coverage.

Additionally, Congress has interfered with local laws that prevent discrimination based on an individual's reproductive health decisions. The Reproductive Health Non-Discrimination Act ensures people are not penalized at work for their personal reproductive health care decisions. No employer has the right to know about personal medical decisions, much less act on them. It should not be the business of Congress to overturn local laws that protect local workers.

Further, previous congressional efforts attempted to overturn, and continue to block, voter initiatives to change marijuana laws that were shown to unfairly target minorities. Congress has gone so far as to bar the District from counting votes on a citizen-led initiative. Most recently, an initiative won the support of over 70 percent of District voters. In the end, the process has created a confusing conflict of laws unique to the District allowing for medicinal and personal use of marijuana but not allowing Washington DC to tax and regulate its sale. In short, congressional meddling has kept the sale of marijuana unregulated and uncontrolled.

Each year, DC faces the threat of legislation that bars local spending on critically needed HIV/AIDS prevention programs.

Congressional interference into these local matters is unfair and intolerable. It is a gross misinterpretation of both the United States Constitution and the Home Rule Act.

Right now, Americans are debating these and other issues in communities throughout this country. But, what is not up for debate is who gets to decide these questions. DC's locally elected leadership should decide what is best for the people of the District of Columbia. Or, as former Oversight Committee Chairman Rep. Trey Gowdy said, he "...was not the Mayor of the District of Columbia."

The Mayor and the Council of the District of Columbia were elected by DC residents to represent our interests. Congress does not impose its views on any other local jurisdiction, and Americans in DC have no vote in the Congress to cast against this ongoing, relentless attack on local democracy. Until such time that the residents of the District achieve full equality through Statehood, we expect Congress to allow District residents to manage their own affairs without interference or meddling.

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We urge the Committees to preserve the legislation as introduced and oppose any rollbacks of local autonomy and any other efforts that seek to impose Congress' views upon DC residents.

Sincerely,

DC Vote

American Civil Liberties Union
American Civil Liberties Union - DC
Alliance for Justice
American Family Voices
Americans for Democratic Action
Anacostia Coordinating Committee
BYP100 DC
Catholics for Choice
Center for Environmental Health
Center for Popular Democracy
Clean Water Action
Collective Action for Safe Spaces
Common Cause
Compassion and Choices
DC for Democracy
DCMJ
DC Statehood Coalition
Democracy for America
Democracy Initiative
DEMOS
Endangered Species Coalition
FairVote Action
Food and Water Watch
Friends of the Earth
Gay and Lesbian Activists Alliance
Gertrude Stein Democratic Club
HIPS
Human Rights Campaign
League of Women Voters of the United States
League of Women Voters of DC
Let America Vote
NARAL Pro-Choice America
National Center for Lesbian Rights

National Center for Transgender Equality
National Coalition on Black Civic Participation
National Employment Lawyers Association
National Fair Housing Alliance
National Partnership for Women & Families
National LGBTQ Task Force Action Fund
National Women's Law Center
Neighbors United for DC Statehood
New American Leaders Action Fund
New Progressive Alliance
Our Revolution
People Demanding Action
People For the American Way
Planned Parenthood Federation of America
Planned Parenthood of Metropolitan Washington DC
Pride at Work
Public Justice Center
Public Citizen
Rural Coalition
SEIU 32BJ
Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS)
Sierra Club
Small Planet Institute
Stand Up for Democracy in DC (Free DC)
Unite HERE Local 25
URGE: Unite for Reproductive & Gender Equity
UUA Multicultural Growth & Witness Staff Team
Voices for Progress
Workplace Fairness

CC:
Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton

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