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FCNL General Committee

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Subject: Request for inclusion of a topic in Legislative Policy Statement and Legislative Priorities

Friends –

I come late but filled with passion about a topic which I urge you, I plead with you to consider as one of your core priorities in FCNL's Guiding Policy Document.

I am a member of the Friends Meeting of Washington, and have represented FMW for many years on the Executive Board of the Council of Churches of Greater Washington. I love doing this, and consider it an important way for us to be in touch with the serious issues affecting the lives of Washingtonians. I am currently the Council’s Vice President for Program, and am responsible for setting its direction for the next year. We will do that at our Fall Assembly, on Nov. 21st.

I have persuaded the CofCGW to take up Statehood for the District of Columbia as its main goal. **To this end, I have sought and received FMW’s approval of this objective in our most recent Meeting for Business.** **The Council and FMW would like to ask you to include this topic as one of your core Guiding Policy Document issues.**

Fully half of the four visionary grounding statements of FCNL address this issue –

 ***•We seek a society with equity and justice for all, and***

 ***•We seek a community where every person’s potential may be fulfilled***.

Those are precisely the areas which statehood for the District of Columbia would fulfill. Residents of the District of Columbia are ill-served by an arrangement which leaves them as permanent, helpless subjects of a Congress which does not represent them and which has the right at will to supplant, rescind and require withdrawal of local legislation, including our own budget and taxing priorities.

The result of the inequitable interference in the District’s financial situation – an interference that would be eliminated if DC were a state – has shown itself vividly in the reaction of our citizens to the recent sequestration and government shut down status in the District. It has become evident that the sequestration and federal governmental shutdown have affected the District in ways that have not occurred in states.   The repercussive effects of sequestration and governmental shutdown have monetarily affected the poor of the District even more heavily than the poor living in states.  Our poor suffer even more heavily - for example, the number of District residents applying for unemployment compensation in the course of the last week alone shows a huge increase - over 37,000 residents applied for assistance. **Every person’s potential is a goal rendered meaningless when federal actions which cannot be rejected stress the District proportionally more than has been the case in states.**

To be constitutionally a full citizen of the United States, an American must be a citizen of a state. The opening sentence of our Constitution makes this clear. “We the People of the United States” are its opening words. The Constitution of the United States is based upon the building blocks of states.

Given this assumption, it has become clear to us over the course of time that only statehood will ever meet the constitutional needs for total equality of treatment of the residents of the District of Columbia. Article IV, Section 2 of the US Constitution, shows us why. It says, “The Citizens of each State shall be entitled to all Privileges and Immunities of Citizens in the several States.” But we are not citizens of any state.

Why is this important? Anything less – such as the enactment of voting rights in Congress instead of statehood – does not, without statehood, protect the residents from inequitable and unwelcome Congressional oversight. Equality of treatment does not admit permutations or shades of equality. Any restriction that does not apply equally to each and every state of this country and citizen therein could not be applied solely to Washington, and would not – if we were to become the state of New Columbia Statehood is an either-or proposition; nothing less than statehood can guarantee equality of treatment. **Without being a state we are in no position to seek equity and justice for all.**

Our lack of statehood and the ongoing imposition of congressional oversight call into question the grand words of our Declaration of Independence when applied to the residents of the District.  "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness....That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed..."

We at the Council of Churches of Greater Washington ask the support of the FCNL General Committee to include efforts to fully mitigate the fundamental inequity of our situation into your 10-year plan, secure in the understanding that only statehood is permanent, and thereby sufficient to our need. We ask your help because your policy goals snugly fit the nature of our problem. We hope and pray that you will find our query appropriate, sufficient, sustainable and worthy. We ask you to hold our issue in the Light of God’s Love, in the belief that the result will bless the residents of the District of Columbia – hopefully by allowing us to become citizens of the State of New Columbia.

As Way Opens –

Susan Meehan

FMW Representative to the Council of Churches of Greater Washington

And Vice President for Program therein

**For your information, I am attaching an editorial below in last Sunday’s Washington Post that addresses some of these problems** <http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-district-gains-control-of-the-purse-for-now/2013/10/19/77fbf98a-3831-11e3-80c6-7e6dd8d22d8f_story.html>

**The Post’s View**

**The District gains control of the purse, for now**

But the District still needs a permanent fix for its spending authority

By [Editorial Board](http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-posts-view/2011/12/07/gIQAoEIscO_page.html), Published: October 19 [October 20 in print edition]

SUCH IS THE second-class status of D.C. residents that it is considered a big victory that the District will be able to spend its local tax dollars [through next September](http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/dc-politics/dc-is-poised-to-win-yearlong-spending-authority-in-capitol-hill-shutdown-deal/2013/10/16/5ddbde2e-369e-11e3-80c6-7e6dd8d22d8f_story.html).

Don’t get us wrong: we understand the importance of the city being immunized from the threat of another federal government shutdown. We applaud the tenacity of local officials who successfully pled the District’s case. But it is maddening that the nation’s capital must get on bended knee for a basic right — expenditure of its own tax dollars — that it is taken for granted by every state and locality in the nation.

Legislation approved this week by Congress and signed by President Obama to raise the debt ceiling and reopen the federal government contains a provision that allows D.C. to spend its own local funds regardless of possible future federal shutdowns during the 2014 fiscal year. Because its budget is tied to the federal appropriations process, the city becomes vulnerable when Congress is — as just occurred — at an impasse.

The D.C. measure, included in the bipartisan agreement brokered by Senate leaders, was hailed as a “historic first” by D.C. Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton (D) who, along with Mayor Vincent C. Gray (D), gave heightened visibility to the city’s plight by challenging Democratic opposition to uncoupling the city from the federal shutdown. Ms. Norton [pointedly questioned Mr. Obama](http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/post-politics/wp/2013/10/09/eleanor-holmes-norton-confronts-obama-on-d-c-budget-bill/) while [Mr. Gray confronted Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid](http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/dc-politics/dc-mayor-gray-confronts-reid-on-capitol-steps-over-shutdowns-impact-on-city/2013/10/09/02577428-3103-11e3-89ae-16e186e117d8_story.html) (D-Nev.)

It’s good that their efforts paid off, but the measure approved last week doesn’t go far enough. It doesn’t give the city lasting authority over the right to spend the roughly $6 billion it raises each year in local funds or to choose when its budget year should start.

A measure amending the city’s charter to allow local officials to spend these funds without a congressional appropriation was approved by voters this year but its legality has been questioned. It’s unclear what will happen when it goes into effect in January.