

# Campaign Plan and Constitutional Framework for District of Columbia Statehood

## Executive Summary

The political disenfranchisement of the more than 700,000 residents of the District of Columbia is an ongoing constitutional crisis and a severe violation of international human rights law. While the District's population exceeds that of Wyoming and Vermont, and is comparable to Delaware and Alaska, its citizens are systematically denied voting representation in the national legislature. Furthermore, under the District Clause of the United States Constitution, Congress retains ultimate authority to micromanage local affairs, override municipal legislation, and control local tax revenues.

This report presents a comprehensive, legally rigorous mayoral campaign plan to secure the admission of the District of Columbia as the 51st state: the State of Washington, Douglass Commonwealth. By transcending the limitations of the leading mayoral platforms, this campaign establishes a strategic roadmap that merges domestic constitutional jurisprudence with international human rights treaties. This sovereign commonwealth strategy frames statehood not as a distant legislative favor to be negotiated, but as an immediate human rights mandate and a constitutional obligation that the local executive will actively enforce.

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## Comparative Platform and Debate Analysis

The necessity of this campaign's comprehensive statehood plan is highlighted by the severe deficiencies in the platforms and debate performances of the other leading mayoral candidates. During the primary campaign, the two frontrunners have treated local autonomy and statehood with either ideological abstraction or transactional compromise, failing to offer voters a legally sound path forward.

## The March 14 Candidate Forum and the Breakdown of Substance

The critical difference in leadership was demonstrated on March 14, 2026, at the candidate forum organized by Free D.C., a prominent non-profit organization dedicated to securing statehood for the District. Held before several hundred residents at Matthews Memorial Baptist

Church in Anacostia, the forum was explicitly designed to address the path to statehood and the protection of local self-governance. Rather than presenting concrete plans to challenge federal overreach or navigate the constitutional path to statehood, the two leading candidates engaged in a testy, highly personal shouting match.

The progressive challenger representing Ward 4 accused her opponent of aligning with corporate utilities, such as Washington Gas and Pepco, at the expense of working-class residents. In response, the pragmatic former citywide councilmember attacked the progressive challenger's legislative record, claiming she had failed to deliver standalone legislation and accusing her of trying to "legislate via TikTok and Instagram". The exchange became so chaotic that candidates abandoned protocol, shouting over one another until one candidate walked off the stage.

This theatrical bickering on social media and debate stages illustrates why a new mayoral path is essential. When presented with a platform dedicated to the single most important civil rights issue facing the District, the leading candidates chose personal grievances over strategic statecraft. This campaign's platform rises above this posturing by offering a structured plan that treats statehood as a legal and administrative objective rather than a rhetorical talking point.

## **Structural Deficiencies in the Opposing Platforms**

Beyond the debates, the published platforms of the opposing candidates reveal deep strategic flaws. The activist-ideological platform, supported by national progressive networks, approaches federal relations through defensive municipal resistance. This platform promises to protect local autonomy by collaborating with the local Attorney General and promising that the mayor will personally "walk the halls of Congress" to build progressive coalitions.

However, political analysts note that this approach fails to understand the structural realities of District governance. Emulating activist mayoral campaigns in other major cities is structurally flawed because those cities operate under the protection of a sovereign state legislature and governor. The District has no such shield; its effective governor is the President, and its state legislature is a frequently hostile federal Congress. Relying solely on progressive congressional lobbying is a passive strategy that leaves the District vulnerable to federal intervention.

Conversely, the transactional-pragmatic platform, advanced by a former congressional staffer and civil rights attorney, advocates for a non-ideological, business-aligned approach. This platform emphasizes working directly with congressional leadership, pointing to local land transfers—such as the RFK Stadium development—as evidence that cooperating with federal overseers can yield material benefits.

This transactional model, however, carries severe systemic risks. By treating local self-

governance as a series of negotiable transactions, this platform validates the federal government's paternalistic authority. It accommodates federal interference in the local budget and safety laws in exchange for minor concessions, compromising the broader struggle for permanent democratic representation.

## Comparative Strategic Analysis Matrix

Strategic Dimensions	The Activist-Ideological Platform	The Transactional-Pragmatic Platform	The Campaign's Sovereign-Constitutional Model
<b>Primary Philosophy</b>	Grassroots progressive advocacy and moral resistance.	Non-ideological, business-aligned transactionalism.	Assertive municipal sovereignty, constitutional obligation, and human rights law.
<b>Debate Focus</b>	Accusations of corporate utility capture and performative progressive posturing.	Attacks on legislative execution and warnings against social media-driven governance.	Focus on legal roadmaps, constitutional arguments, and international treaty enforcement.
<b>Federal Relations</b>	Personal congressional lobbying to build progressive coalitions.	Direct dealmaking with congressional committee leadership.	Assertive execution of the Tennessee Plan and legal challenges in domestic and international courts.
<b>Autonomy Defense</b>	Joint statements with local officials and defensive policy shifts.	Incremental preservation of Home Rule through political compromises.	Active municipal non-cooperation and expansion of local civil rights protections.

<b>Statehood Mechanism</b>	Reliance on national progressive advocacy networks and public protests.	Traditional legislative process dependent on federal political consensus.	Legal enforcement of the 14th Amendment and the modern execution of the Tennessee Plan.
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## The Legal and Constitutional Framework of Statehood

Opponents of District statehood have long maintained that the nation's capital cannot become a state without a constitutional amendment. A rigorous analysis of the text, history, and structure of the United States Constitution demonstrates that Congress possesses the full authority to grant statehood through simple legislation, and that the Reconstruction Amendments impose a constitutional obligation to do so.

### The Mechanics of the Admissions and District Clauses

The constitutional path to statehood lies in the separation of the residential and commercial areas of the District from the neutral seat of the federal government. The Admissions Clause in Article IV, Section 3 of the Constitution grants Congress the explicit power to admit new states into the Union. Historically, 37 of the current 50 states have been admitted through simple legislation passed by Congress, and none of these admissions have ever been successfully challenged in federal court.

The District Clause in Article I, Section 8, Clause 17 grants Congress exclusive legislative jurisdiction over the seat of the federal government. Crucially, the text of the clause establishes a maximum geographic size for the federal district—ten miles square—but does not set a minimum size, specific location, or population requirement. Under this authority, Congress has previously modified the boundaries of the federal district, most notably through the retrocession of Alexandria to Virginia in 1846.

The Washington, D.C. Admission Act (H.R. 51 and S. 51) utilizes this same mechanism by shrinking the federal seat of government to a small enclave containing the Capitol, the White House, the Supreme Court, and the National Mall, while admitting the remaining residential and commercial neighborhoods as the State of Washington, Douglass Commonwealth.

## The Fourteenth Amendment and Equal National Citizenship

While traditional legal scholarship frames statehood as a discretionary power of Congress, modern constitutional theory demonstrates that the admission of the District is a constitutional requirement under the Fourteenth Amendment. The Citizenship Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment establishes birthright national citizenship and decouples it from racial caste, making state citizenship a necessary component of equal national citizenship.

Under the structure of American federalism, critical political and civil rights—including voting representation in the Senate and House of Representatives—are constitutionally designed to be exercised exclusively through states. Because national citizenship must be realized in part through the states, denying the residents of the District state citizenship deprives them of the fundamental rights guaranteed by their national citizenship. Conscientious members of Congress, bound by their oath to support the Constitution, are therefore obligated to vote for statehood to reconcile this ongoing democratic deficit.

## Addressing the Twenty-Third Amendment Objection

Critics argue that the Twenty-Third Amendment, which grants the federal district three electors in the Electoral College, presents an insurmountable barrier to statehood. They contend that if the District's population is reduced to the small enclave surrounding the White House, the President's family would effectively control three electoral votes.

This argument conflates a political challenge with a constitutional barrier. The Twenty-Third Amendment provides that the federal district shall appoint electors "in such manner as the Congress may direct". Congress possesses the statutory discretion to direct that these electoral votes be awarded to the winner of the national popular vote, nullifying the possibility of a tiny federal enclave controlling those votes. While a formal constitutional repeal of the Twenty-Third Amendment is the ultimate goal, statehood can be granted immediately via statute while the repeal process is underway.

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## The International Human Rights Legality

The disenfranchisement of District of Columbia residents is a severe violation of international human rights treaties ratified by the United States. The international legal framework provides a powerful mechanism for the mayoral campaign to assert the District's right to self-determination.

## **Violations of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)**

The United States ratified the ICCPR in 1992, thereby binding itself to protect the political and civil rights outlined in the treaty. Article 25 of the ICCPR explicitly guarantees that every citizen shall have the right and the opportunity, without unreasonable restrictions, to take part in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through freely chosen representatives, and to vote and be elected.

The United Nations Human Rights Committee, which monitors compliance with the treaty, has repeatedly reviewed the status of the District of Columbia and expressed formal concern. The Committee has concluded that the denial of voting representation in Congress for the District's residents is incompatible with Article 25 of the Covenant, rejecting the federal government's defense that its constitutional structure exempts it from providing equal political rights to capital residents.

## **The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) Precedent**

The global legal case for statehood is anchored by the landmark ruling of the IACHR of the Organization of American States (OAS). On December 29, 2003, after more than a decade of litigation brought by the Statehood Solidarity Committee on behalf of District residents, the Commission issued Report No. 98/03.

The IACHR concluded that the United States is responsible for violations of Articles II (right to equality before the law) and XX (right to vote and participate in government) of the American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man. The Commission recommended that the United States provide an effective remedy by adopting legislative or other measures necessary to guarantee District residents their right to participate in the federal legislature. The federal government's failure to implement these recommendations constitutes a violation of its international treaty obligations.

## **The Human Rights City Framework and Local Governance**

In 2008, the District of Columbia became the first municipality in the United States to declare itself a "Human Rights City" through a unanimous City Council resolution. This designation commits the local government to utilizing the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) as a guide for municipal policies, program development, and budget allocations.

The campaign will utilize this framework to align local municipal governance with international standards. The District's local human rights protections, established by the historic D.C. Human Rights Act of 1977, have been progressively expanded. In 2022, the local law was amended to

include homeless status and sealed eviction records as protected traits, bringing the total number of protected categories to 23. This progressive local civil rights regime demonstrates the District's capacity to model human rights protections that surpass the federal baseline.

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## Alternative Perspectives: Objections and Counterarguments

A successful campaign plan must address the historical, political, and constitutional objections raised by opponents of statehood, specifically those concerning federal neutrality and retrocession.

### The Rationale of Federal Neutrality and Federalist No. 43

Opponents of statehood frequently cite James Madison's arguments in Federalist No. 43 to assert that the national capital must remain independent of any state. Madison argued that a capital city situated within a state would subject the federal government to undue influence, potential coercion, or "host state blackmail" regarding essential municipal resources, public safety, and infrastructure.

The proposed statehood plan directly addresses this concern by preserving a reduced federal district under the exclusive jurisdiction of Congress. The federal government would retain absolute control over its own property and operations within the shrunken enclave, ensuring its independence from the surrounding State of Washington, Douglass Commonwealth.

### The Fallacy and Racism of Retrocession

As an alternative to statehood, opponents often propose retroceding the residential areas of the District back to the state of Maryland, similar to the 1846 retrocession of Alexandria to Virginia. Proponents of retrocession argue it is an easier path that would grant residents voting rights in Maryland while avoiding the addition of two new U.S. senators.

However, retrocession is constitutionally and politically unviable. Under Article IV, Section 3 of the Constitution, no new state can be formed from the territory of an existing state without the consent of that state's legislature. The state of Maryland has repeatedly made clear that it does not consent to retrocession, and Maryland voters oppose the proposal by a 57-36 percent margin. Furthermore, 86 percent of District voters rejected retrocession in favor of statehood in 2016, making retrocession a direct violation of local self-determination.

Historically, retrocession has been linked to racial discrimination and the preservation of slavery. The 1846 retrocession of Alexandria was driven by pro-slavery factions who feared that Congress would abolish the slave trade within the federal district, which would have disrupted the local slave-trading economy.

Modern retrocession proposals similarly function as a tactic to dilute the political influence of the District's concentrated Black and Brown communities. Subsuming the District into Maryland would prevent its urban, progressive, and racially diverse population from electing independent U.S. senators, thereby maintaining the structural under-representation of urban voters of color in the federal legislature.

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## The Mayoral Campaign Execution Plan

To move beyond the performative and transactional limits of previous administrations, the campaign will implement a strategic, four-phase plan to achieve statehood.

### Phase I: Re-activating the Tennessee Plan

The campaign will prioritize the modern execution of the Tennessee Plan, which was approved by 86 percent of District voters in 2016 but allowed to stall under subsequent administrations.

- **Modernize the State Constitution:** The mayoral administration will convene a constitutional convention to update the draft constitution approved in 2016, incorporating modern protections for workers, tenant cooperatives, and environmental justice.
- **Re-mobilize the Shadow Congressional Delegation:** The Mayor will fully fund and politically integrate the District's elected shadow senators and representative. They will be tasked with operating as active state ambassadors, lobbying state legislatures across the country to pass resolutions supporting the admission of the Douglass Commonwealth.

### Phase II: Asserting Municipal Sovereignty

The Mayor will utilize executive authority to establish a functioning sovereign state apparatus, protecting local residents from federal interference.

- **Enforce Local Immigrant Protections:** Issue an executive order on day one ending all Metropolitan Police Department cooperation with federal immigration authorities and ICE. Establish a municipally funded civil right-to-counsel program to provide free legal representation to immigrant families facing deportation.
- **Shield Local Revenues:** Establish municipal trust funds and non-profit partnerships to

protect local tax revenues from congressional appropriations riders, ensuring the District can fund local initiatives, such as reproductive healthcare and clean-needle exchanges, despite congressional opposition.

## Phase III: Multi-Pronged Constitutional Litigation

The administration will launch a coordinated legal offensive in both federal courts and international tribunals.

- **Equal Protection and Citizenship Litigation:** Partner with civil rights legal funds to file federal lawsuits asserting that the denial of congressional voting representation violates the Citizenship Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment and the equal protection guarantees of the Fifth Amendment.
- **International Treaty Enforcement:** File formal petitions with the IACHR to enforce the 2003 ruling in Case 11.204 and seek advisory opinions from the United Nations Human Rights Committee regarding violations of the ICCPR, generating global diplomatic pressure on the federal government.

## Phase IV: National Coalition-Building and Mobilization

The campaign will align the statehood movement with broader national struggles for civil and economic rights.

- **The Multiracial Democracy Coalition:** Partner with voting rights organizations in the South and Midwest to frame District statehood as a critical component of the fight against national voter suppression and the dilution of Black political power.
- **Labor and Environmental Justice Alliances:** Build coalitions with national labor unions and environmental organizations, demonstrating how federal interference in local affairs blocks progressive climate policies and worker protections.

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## Economic Viability and Transition Management

Opponents often argue that the District is a "company town" that lacks the economic diversity and financial stability necessary to function as an independent state. This claim is directly contradicted by the District's actual financial performance and existing state-level administrative infrastructure.

## Fiscal and Demographic Viability Indicators

The District of Columbia possesses the economic and demographic resources to operate as a self-sustaining state, outperforming multiple existing states across key economic measures.

Viability Indicator	District of Columbia Statistics	Comparative State Baseline	Policy and Governance Implications
<b>Population</b>	Approximately 700,000 residents.	Larger than Wyoming and Vermont; comparable to Alaska and Delaware.	Exceeds the historical population threshold utilized for the admission of most U.S. states.
<b>Federal Tax Contributions</b>	Highest per capita federal income tax in the United States.	Pays more total federal taxes than 12 states; more income tax than 19 states.	Establishes the fundamental democratic claim of "no taxation without representation".
<b>Gross Domestic Product (GDP)</b>	Larger than 15 existing states.	Higher per capita GDP and personal income than any state.	Confirms a robust, highly productive economy capable of supporting state-level obligations.
<b>Fiscal Health</b>	29 consecutive balanced local budgets.	Outperforms multiple states currently facing structural deficits.	Demonstrates exceptional municipal fiscal discipline and complete financial independence.
<b>Administrative</b>	Manages Medicaid,	Operates public	Proves the local

<b>Capacity</b>	SNAP, and state-equivalent federal block grants.	education, transportation, and health systems.	government already functions as a de facto state administrative apparatus.
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## Managing the Judicial and Corrective Transition

While the District already operates as a de facto state for health, education, and human services, the primary transition will occur within the judicial and correctional systems. Currently, the federal government funds the District's local court system and houses adult felons convicted under the D.C. Code.

Upon statehood, these systems will transition to state-level control. The campaign's transition plan will establish a sovereign judicial system, shifting prosecutorial authority from the federally appointed U.S. Attorney to an elected State Attorney General. This change ensures that prosecution policies and criminal justice reforms are directly accountable to the local community.

Additionally, local correctional facilities will be modernized and aligned with a public health framework for violence prevention, moving away from federal carceral models and establishing local clemency authority under the State Governor.

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## Conclusions and Strategic Directives

The path to statehood for the District of Columbia requires a fundamental shift in local leadership. The prevailing mayoral platforms offer either performative progressive resistance or transactional compromises that yield small concessions while entrenching federal overreach.

To secure permanent democratic representation and protect the rights of its residents, the mayoral administration will implement the following direct strategic directives:

1. **Assert Municipal Sovereignty on Day One:** Implement local executive orders to protect immigrants, shield municipal revenues, and expand civil rights, establishing the District as a fully self-governing commonwealth.
2. **Execute a Modernized Tennessee Plan:** Re-convene the constitutional convention to update the draft state constitution, and fully fund the shadow delegation to build a national legislative mandate.
3. **Launch Coordinated litigation:** Initiate federal lawsuits based on the equal citizenship



# RAISING THE STANDARDS

Preparing DC for Statehood

mandate of the Fourteenth Amendment, while seeking international treaty enforcement through the IACHR and the United Nations.

4. **Reject the Retrocession Compromise:** Maintain a firm opposition to retrocession, framing it as a racially discriminatory and unconstitutional attempt to dilute the political voice of the District's urban communities of color.

By implementing this comprehensive strategy, the campaign establishes a clear, legally sound roadmap to end over two centuries of disenfranchisement and admit the State of Washington, Douglass Commonwealth, as an equal member of the Union.