

**Testimony of Shelley L. Tomkin**  
**1<sup>st</sup> Vice Chair, Ward 3 Democratic Committee**  
**Before the DC City Council, Committee on Aging and Community Affairs**  
**On the 51<sup>st</sup> State Commission Establishment Act of 2009**

I wish to thank the Committee for the opportunity to testify on Bill 18-0177 entitled the 51<sup>st</sup> State Commission Establishment Act of 2009 on behalf of the Ward 3 Democratic Committee. My name is Shelley Tomkin, and I am 1<sup>st</sup> Vice Chair of the Committee. I send you greetings from our Chair, Tom Smith who could not be here today. I am proud to report that The Ward Three Democratic Committee has voted formally in support of DC statehood after considering the issue of statehood and voting rights for DC for the last five months. We have become the first ward political organization to support DC statehood since the “Yes We Can Movement” was initiated this past January. This resolution was approved by Committee delegates at our June 19<sup>th</sup> meeting.

The mission of the Ward 3 Democratic Committee is to support and elect Democratic candidates for local and national office; and to provide a forum for democratic voters in Ward 3 and the community as a whole to discuss issues affecting our community. The Committee seeks to organize and mobilize voters in Ward 3 to register as Democrats and to actively participate in a grassroots organization committed to the election of democratic candidates at all levels of government in DC, the regional metropolitan area, and across the country. The Ward 3 Democratic Committee works closely with local elected officials to encourage accountability and good government practices.

The motivating reasons behind the Statehood resolution our Committee passed last month are familiar ones---in sum that the citizens of the District of Columbia deserve the same level of voting representation in the House of Representatives and the Senate as well as the benefits of state sovereignty that other U.S. citizens enjoy---as a matter of simple justice and equality.

The views expressed in this testimony have also been influenced by my status as a native Washingtonian and a professor of political science who has been striving over the past 30 years to promote civic engagement among my students and my community. It is particularly disheartening to explain to the significant number of my students who are DC residents and U.S. citizens that their rights are not equal to those of their classmates who are U.S. citizens from any of the 50 states---though their responsibilities to pay federal taxes are the same.

I commend those DC Council members who sponsored this legislation with the intent of enhancing “the educational and promotional efforts regarding the lack of full congressional representation for the District of Columbia.” Educational efforts focused on DC’s lack of voting rights and statehood are extremely important as much confusion, misunderstanding, and apathy characterize public understanding of this topic both within and outside of DC. Moreover, one of the significant strengths of this legislation as currently drafted is its requirement that the 51<sup>st</sup> State Commission submit “detailed reports and findings to the U.S. Congress and the Council” within 180 days. This deadline will expedite the Committee’s action and prevent inaction and delay. Thus, I am testifying today to urge the Council to

approve the 51<sup>st</sup> State Commission Establishment Act of 2009 but with three suggested modifications.

--First, the legislative language in the bill mandates that the 51<sup>st</sup> State Commission conduct a “full and complete study” of actions that must be taken in order to establish DC as a state “or” to obtain full voting representation without designation as a state. The “or” in this language would seem to allow for the Commission to undertake education and promotion of the ramifications of either statehood or full voting representation. Both options should be examined. The “or” should at very least be changed to an “and” to prevent that outcome.

--Second, as an officer of a grassroots community organization, I would urge that the current legislation include “two” as opposed to “one” appointed member from each Ward. Further, I would urge that the Shadow Senators and Representative be included as automatic members of the Commission. While these changes will increase the size of the Commission, they will also expand its reach and its ability to realize its objectives.

--Third, I suggest the addition of statutory language that assures that all the appointed members of the Commission be residents of the District of Columbia. S 1-125, the current statute includes such a requirement. If there are certain individuals residing outside of DC whose skills or expertise are essential to the functioning of the Commission, then their inclusion could be written into the language of the statute.

Finally, I wish to thank the Committee for holding this hearing and for drafting this legislative proposal. It constitutes one significant step toward realizing the goal of complete self-determination for the citizens of the District of Columbia. DC statehood is long overdue. DC residents voted in 1980 to support statehood for DC. Although rights are guaranteed to all Americans under our Constitution, the history of the civil rights movement shows us that freedom and equality cannot be taken for granted. Just as so many before us were concerned with extending freedoms to African-Americans and other minorities, women, disabled Americans, gays and lesbians, we the residents of the District of Columbia also must be prepared to fight for our liberties. That is the reason for statehood—to gain more control over our destinies—to have the same rights in the federal system as other Americans expected to pay taxes and serve their country. That is why I am here today. That is why this legislation is important. It is another step in the process that—with perseverance, a willingness to sacrifice and a diehard commitment—will win statehood for DC residents.