

# CIVICS IN REAL LIFE

Civics is all around us. There is a lot to know about the government and how "We the People" interact with the government and each other. Let's help each other expand our civic literacy.

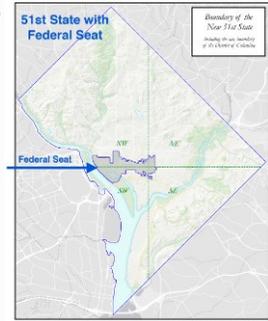
# Making a State: D.C. Edition

A significant debate we see in the news today is one that is constitutionally impactful but, oddly enough, only lightly addressed by the U.S. Constitution: admitting new states into this union.

The last territory to be admitted as a new state was Hawaii, which became our 50th state in 1959, just after Alaska was admitted that same year. 1959 was not that long ago; many of us likely have parents or grandparents who were alive when our flag only had 48 stars! Becoming a state brings with it various advantages and opportunities that motivate some territories to seek statehood, and other states to consider dividing themselves into multiple states.



Since 1801, residents of Washington, D.C. have advocated to become a new star on the flag, and the movement in support of D.C. statehood has only gotten more intense in recent years. So how does the statehood process work?



The Constitution outlines the statehood process in [Article IV, Section 3, Clause 1 \(the Admissions Clause\)](#) which states that "New States may be admitted by the Congress into this

Union; but no new State shall be formed or erected within the Jurisdiction of any other State; nor any State be formed by the Junction of two or more States, or Parts of States, without the Consent of the Legislatures of the States concerned as well as of the Congress." Notice the important differences in the statehood process when we compare non-states, such as districts and territories, with existing states. There are, however, some core [principles and steps](#) that usually come into play when a territory wants to become a state. These are laid out in the Admissions Clause and have been addressed by both Congress and the Courts over many years.

It's important to keep in mind that just because a territory may wish to become a state does not mean it will happen, since Congress must ultimately approve entry into the Union (and ultimately decides the fate of Washington, D.C.). The city is in a unique position as compared to other territories, since it is the home of the federal government. Congress ultimately has [final say](#) over almost every decision made by the local government in the city, sometimes voiding those very decisions. With this in mind, what are the arguments for and against statehood?



## Arguments in Favor of Statehood for 'New Columbia' or 'Washington, Douglass Commonwealth'

- Washington, D.C. has more than 700,000 residents, larger than the states of Wyoming and Vermont and larger than almost all other states were at their time of admission, including Alaska and Hawaii.
- 86% of residents [voted](#) in favor of statehood in a 2016 referendum.
- The residents of Washington, D.C. have currently no representation in Congress, violating one of the principles the American Revolution was fought for, and making Washington, D.C. the only capital in the democratic world where residents do not have voting rights for representatives.
- The [median income](#) would put the new state near the top of all of the states, while D.C. residents also rank near the highest rate of [per capita](#) federal income taxes, though they have no representation in the Congress that establishes those taxes.
- The federal district (the part of the city where the federal government is located) would [not](#) be a part of the new state so too much influence shouldn't be a concern.



## Arguments Against Statehood for Washington, D.C.

- The area of Washington, D.C. is 17 times [smaller](#) than the current smallest state of Rhode Island
- The territory of Washington, D.C. could be [retroceded](#) (given back) to Maryland where D.C. residents could vote in congressional elections. In 1846, Congress granted the retrocession of the portions of D.C. originally located in Virginia, such as Alexandria and Arlington
- The Founding Fathers never intended Washington, D.C. to be a state.
- It would require a constitutional amendment to overturn the [23rd Amendment](#), which gave the city three electoral votes (otherwise they would go to the sole residents left in the federal district, who live at [1600 Pennsylvania Avenue](#), the White House!!).
- The new state would likely heavily favor one political party and swing the [balance of power](#) in the Senate.
- The new state would have too much influence on the federal government since it would be housed there.

This debate over statehood for Washington, D.C. is likely to continue, though some predict that supporters of statehood are in a better position now than they have ever been. Be sure to keep an eye on this debate as it heats up. And then turn your attention to [Puerto Rico](#)...

**To Think and To Do:** Review the arguments for and against statehood for Washington, D.C. Should it become the 51st state? Why or why not?



Lou Frey Institute

**Learn MORE** about the process of statehood. Free registration may be required.

- [How the States Got Their Shapes](#), from Library of Congress
- [The last time Congress created a new state](#), from National Constitution Center
- [51st Podcast](#), from What's With Washington, WAMU