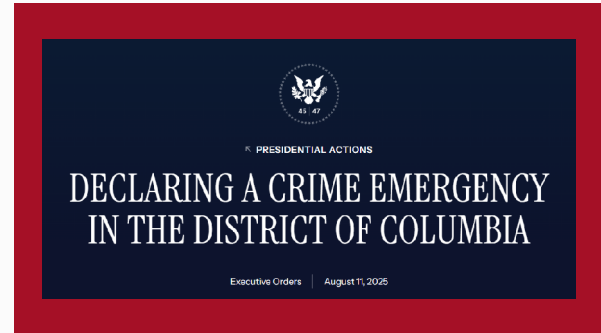


CIVICS IN REAL LIFE

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.

District of Columbia Home Rule Act & Federal Code

On Monday, August 11, 2025, President Trump announced he was deploying the District of Columbia’s National Guard and taking control of the city’s Metropolitan Police Department for the purpose of ensuring the safety and security of the city. Despite some questioning the president’s actions, the [Home Rule Act of 1973](#), authorizes him to take control of the District’s police force, and the [Federal Code of the District of Columbia](#) allows him broad authority over its National Guard. So, what are these statutes, and what do they say regarding the president’s authority?



Governance in our nation’s capital is unique. Since the [ratification of the Constitution](#), the district that would be our capital has fallen under the supervision of the federal government, based on [Article I, Section 8](#). By 1801, an act known as the [Organic Act](#) ensured that final authority over what became known as Washington, District of Columbia, would belong to the United States Congress. It has only been in the last 52 years that Washington, D.C. has been able to govern itself under the Home Rule Act. Though the U.S. Congress has at times stepped in and imposed limits or changes to District policies and laws, it has tended to allow the District to govern itself.

Under the Act, the District of Columbia is able to elect a mayor and city council. Together, in collaboration with the [District’s various executive departments and agencies](#), they are largely responsible for the day-to-day operations of the city. However, much of what they do is subject to congressional approval. Though not often done, Congress may overturn city ordinances, can decide how the District spends its money, and even prohibit Washington, D.C. from collecting taxes from certain entities. The Act also grants the president of the United States [emergency control of the District’s Metropolitan Police Department](#) (MPD). Per the Act, when:

“the president of the United States determines that special conditions of an emergency nature exist which require the use of the Metropolitan Police force for federal purposes, he may direct the Mayor to provide him, and the Mayor shall provide, such services of the Metropolitan Police force as the President may deem necessary and appropriate.”

However, the Act does not grant the president unconditional authority over the MPD. Per the Act, he is [required to notify](#) Congress of the reasons why he takes control of the MPD. Under this provision, control of the MPD ends after 30 days unless Congress authorizes a joint resolution allowing the president to maintain control. Despite having this authority,

President Trump is the first sitting president to use it.

Additionally, the Federal Code for the District of Columbia grants the power to the president as commander-in-chief of the armed forces the [authority to mobilize the National Guard of the District of Columbia](#), and unlike the National Guard of the 50 states, the president does not need local approval to federalize them.

Ultimately, [Congress is responsible](#) for the District of Columbia, and through its legislative power has delegated some of that responsibility to the president. Even though the District governs itself, the Home Rule Act, in conjunction with other federal statutes, limits the District’s local control, despite it having a functioning city government.



To Think and To Do:

Even though Washington, D.C. has a functioning city government, why do you think the Founders placed the District of Columbia under federal control? Explain.

Learn More:

- [Current Executive Actions, White House](#)
- [District of Columbia](#)
- [Legislative Authority](#)



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