

**Testimony of David Seidman, Capital Rights Lab  
Before the D.C. Council Committee on Executive Administration and Labor  
May 1, 2026**

Chairperson Bonds and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify.

My name is David Seidman. I am the Executive Director of Capital Rights Lab, a nonpartisan, nonprofit civil rights organization fighting for expanded democratic rights for District residents. Our position is simple: we cannot wait for statehood to begin building the legal and institutional structures that protect and promote self-governance.

That starts here. At home. With semi-open primaries.

Every argument for DC statehood rests on a simple principle: a government derives its legitimacy from the consent of those it governs. We cannot credibly ask Congress and the country for the full rights and privileges of statehood when we deny our own residents the right to vote in the only elections that matter in this city.

Fully funding Initiative 83 directly impacts the fight for statehood in three ways.

First, it strengthens the moral and practical case. DC's credibility to advocate outside of the District is dependent on a proven ability to govern ourselves within it. The Democratic primary is the election in this city. DC has never in modern history elected anyone other than a Democrat as Mayor, Chair of the Council, Attorney General, or Delegate. Excluding 85,000 independent DC voters from participating in the political process is contrary to good governance.

Second, voting is habit-forming. Research has shown that people who vote in one election are significantly more likely to vote in the next.<sup>1</sup> And primary voters in

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<sup>1</sup> Gerber, Green & Shachar, "Voting May Be Habit Forming: Evidence From a Randomized Field Experiment," *American Journal of Political Science* (2003) — <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3186114?seq=1>

particular have been shown to be three times more likely to engage with civic organizations in non-electoral ways.<sup>2</sup>

Third, a supermajority of District voters voted for Initiative 83. The issue should be settled. Funding semi-open primaries is about fairness and respect for DC voters. To deny the will of those same voters under the guise of cost, when the cost breakdown per resident is \$0.39 per year, seriously undermines our ability to demonstrate that DC's institutions are able to support statehood.

These are not abstract concerns. I testified before the Council earlier this year on the federal takeover of the Metropolitan Police Department. Since then, the federal government has continued to act inside the District on the premise that DC cannot be trusted to govern itself. Every gap in our democratic legitimacy at home, every resident we exclude from elections, is evidence handed to those who disenfranchise us. We cannot afford to keep building their case for them.

Funding semi-open primaries is a small budget choice with outside consequences. The Council has the opportunity to expand the franchise, strengthen our civic infrastructure, and send a message that we are ready for self-rule. The Council should take it.

Thank you. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

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<sup>2</sup> Werfel, "Voting and civic engagement: Results from an online field experiment," *Research & Politics* (2017) — <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/2053168017690736>