

## Timeline

**1788** - The U.S. Constitution is ratified and includes Article 1, Section 8 which gives Congress the power "to exercise exclusive legislation in all cases whatsoever over such capital district."

**1790** - The Residency Act of 1790 gives President George Washington the power to choose a site for the capital city on the east bank of the Potomac River. The following year, the three commissioners overseeing the building of the city name it the City of Washington in the Territory of Columbia.

**1801** - The Organic Act of 1801 divides the District into the counties of Washington (former Maryland area) and Alexandria (former Virginia area). Congress assumes control of the District of Columbia and residents of the nation's capital lose the right to congressional representation, which they had previously had as residents of the states of Maryland and Virginia.

**1802** - Congress grants the City of Washington its first municipal chapter. This allows eligible voters, white men who pay taxes and have lived in Washington City for at least a year, to elect a 12-member council. The mayor is appointed by the president.

**1820** - Eligible voters receive the right to elect their own mayor.

**1846** - Retrocession - Congress passes a law returning the city of Alexandria and Alexandria County (now Arlington) to the state of Virginia. Residents of these districts are now citizens of Virginia and regain full representation in Congress.

**1867** - H.R. 1 grants Black men who are citizens the right to vote in municipal elections.

**1871** - Under the District of Columbia Organic Act of 1871, Congress abolishes the governments of Georgetown, Washington City and Washington County and imposes a territorial government. Citizens lost the right to elect mayors. Instead the U.S. president appoints a governor, a Legislative Council, and a Board of Public Works. Citizens regain the right to elect a House of Delegates and a non-voting delegate to Congress.

**1874** - After a congressional investigation over concerns of excessive spending, Congress ends the territorial government and establishes a board of three commissioners — including one representative from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers — appointed to manage the city. Initially a temporary measure, this was made permanent with the passage of the **Organic Act of 1878**.

**1955** - Congress passes a bill to allow DC citizens to vote for Republican and Democratic convention delegates, allowing DC to hold a primary election in **1956**.

**1961** - The 23rd Amendment to the U.S. Constitution is ratified. This grants DC residents the right to vote in U.S. Presidential elections for the first time in the 20th century.

**1967** - President Lyndon B. Johnson issues the Reorganization Plan 3 of 1967 which replaces the board of commissioners with a presidentially appointed 9-member council led by a Mayor/Commissioner.

**1967** - Walter Washington is appointed as DC's Mayor/Commissioner.

**1968** - Congress passes a bill to establish an 11-member school board to provide local oversight of DC schools.

**1973** - Congress passes the "Home Rule Act." This gives citizens the right to elect a mayor and a 13-member Council to make city laws, establish and manage local budgets, and levy local taxes. However, the city cannot tax federal property or incomes of non-District residents who work in DC. Congress retains control over the court system, the right to review and veto laws passed by the DC Council, and to approve its budget.

**1975** - DC Voting Rights Amendment (DCVRA) is introduced in Congress to allow the District voting representation in Congress. This Amendment passes both the House and the Senate and was sent to the states for ratification. However, DCVRA fails to be ratified by enough states before it expires.

**1980** - Nearly 60% of DC voters support a local ballot referendum that outlines a process toward gaining statehood.

**1987** - DC Delegate Walter Fauntroy advocates for a bill on DC Statehood that was voted out of the House District Committee. It never receives a vote on the House floor.

**1993** - DC's Shadow Senator, Jesse Jackson and Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton campaign for a DC Statehood bill results in defeat on the House floor.

**2016** - Nearly 86% of DC voters support a local ballot referendum on DC statehood.

**2021** - Introduced by Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton, H.R. 51 — the Washington, D.C. Admission Act — passes the House.

## Key Terms

### City Council

The legislative branch of local government. The District of Columbia Self-Government and Governmental Reorganization Act of 1973 (also known as the Home Rule Act), allows for an executive branch led by an elected mayor and a legislative branch of local government: the elected 13-member Council.

### Commissioner

An individual appointed to have authority over a jurisdiction. Commissioners were appointed by President George Washington and his successors to govern the District of Columbia for periods of time during the years 1791 - 1802 and 1874 - 1975.

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**Disenfranchisement** The state of being deprived of a right or liberty — most specifically the right to vote. The disenfranchised residents of Washington, DC currently have no voting representation in the U.S. Congress which controls many aspects of daily life in DC.

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**Home Rule** The governing of a municipality by its own citizens, as they see fit, within the bounds of the U.S. Constitution. This is the freedom given to every state and its municipalities. DC is governed by a local government as a result of the District of Columbia Self-Government and Governmental Reorganization Act of 1973. This is, however, a limited version of Home Rule, with many restrictions placed on the local government's ability to govern.

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**Non-voting delegate** A population's representative in the U.S. House of Representatives with no privilege to vote in Congressional proceedings. In 1873-1875, and since 1970, Washington, DC residents have the right to elect one non-voting delegate who may speak on Washington's behalf, introduce legislation and amendments, and vote in committees on which they serve. However, they cannot vote on the final passage of legislation.

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**Organic Act** An act of Congress that establishes a territory and/or how federal lands are to be organized and managed.

Several organic acts defined the governance of Washington D.C., including those of 1801, 1870, and 1878, before the Home Rule Act in 1974.

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**Retrocession** To return previously ceded (freely-given) territory back to a government. The entirety of the Virginia portion of the District of Columbia - the City of Alexandria and Alexandria (now Arlington) County - were retroceded to Virginia by the federal government in 1846.

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**Territorial  
Government**

Areas under U.S. control given limited powers of self-governance by Congress through an organic act, as provided by the Constitution.

In 1871, Congress created a territorial government for Washington, D.C., run by a presidentially appointed governor, an 11-member appointed council, and a 22-member house of delegates elected by D.C.'s population. The territorial government was abolished in 1874.

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