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Senate committee holds hearing on D.C. statehood bill on Tuesday

Meagan Flynn

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D.C. statehood is set to get a hearing before a Senate committee on Tuesday, with proponents trying to push the cause further than it has gone before in Congress even as prospects are low in the evenly divided chamber.

D.C. Mayor Muriel E. Bowser (D) and a host of civil rights and constitutional experts will testify before the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs starting at 10 a.m.

Former senator Joe Lieberman (Conn.), a political independent and former Democrat who pushed D.C. voting rights while in office, and Del. Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-D.C.) will offer opening remarks.

It's statehood's first Senate committee hearing since 2014. The committee did not bring the bill up for a vote that year, but advocates are optimistic that it may get one this year.

D.C. statehood could cost more than \$1 billion. City officials aren't fazed.

Statehood supporters began the year with a burst of momentum after Democrats gained narrow control of the Senate, President Biden strongly backed the cause and the Jan. 6 riot gave Bowser a new reason to remind Congress she lacks control of the D.C. National Guard.

The bill passed the House in April, for the second consecutive year, without a single Republican vote.

But it's a different story in the Senate. Once Sen. Joe Manchin III (D-W.Va.) came out against statehood legislation, and both he and Sen. Kyrsten Sinema (D-Ariz.) said they oppose eliminating the filibuster, statehood's path forward appeared doubtful.

In recent weeks, Manchin has privately toyed with weakening the filibuster through other means, such as lowering the threshold for passage from 60 votes to 55, according to audio obtained by the Intercept.

But Democrats will be hard-pressed to find any Republicans who support statehood. The GOP continues to denounce the legislation as an unconstitutional Democratic power grab. And Democrats are still working on gaining support from Manchin and three other Democrats who have not signed on to co-sponsor the bill.

D.C. statehood moves from political fringe to the center of the national Democratic agenda

One is Sinema — who sits on the Senate Governmental Affairs Committee. She has yet to reveal her position on the legislation, and advocates say they'll be watching her closely on Tuesday.

“We’re hoping she learns a lot about the need for D.C. statehood, that she realizes it’s constitutional, and that she comes out of that hearing feeling she wants to co-sponsor the bill,” said Meagan Hatcher-Mays, a former Norton staffer who now leads the progressive group Indivisible’s statehood advocacy.

Witnesses will include Richard Primus, a professor at the University of Michigan Law School; Marc Morial, president and chief executive of the National Urban League; Derek T. Muller, a professor at the University of Iowa College of Law; and Roger Pilon of the Cato Institute, who has long argued that D.C. statehood is unconstitutional.