February 27, 2004

The Honorable J. Dennis Hastert  
Speaker of the House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Speaker:

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) of the Organization of American States (OAS) recently found the U.S. government in violation of Articles II and XX of the American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man because the U.S. denies voting representation in Congress for citizens of Washington, DC.

We call on the Congress to end that violation by enacting this year a bill that provides voting representation in Congress for Americans who live in our nation’s capital.

The Commission found that the rights of DC citizens to vote and participate in government are “curtailed in such a manner as to deprive the Petitioners of the very essence and effectiveness of that right.” The Commission also found that the U.S. government could not articulate any justifiable reasons for the denial of these fundamental human rights. Additionally, the Commission stated that it “considers it significant that according to the information available, no other federal state in the Western Hemisphere denies the residents of its federal capital the right to vote for representatives in their national legislature.”

The Commission’s findings give an international voice to what we have always known: the disenfranchisement of American citizens living in our nation’s capital violates basic human rights. At a time when we are actively promoting democracy abroad, we have yet to fulfill the promise of American democracy here at home.

The U.S. Congress has the power to right this historic wrong. The leadership of the Congress should work to adopt a bi-partisan bill that ends the disenfranchisement of American citizens who are residents of the District of Columbia.

Sincerely,

Ilir Zherka  
Executive Director, DC Vote

Chellie Pingree  
President & CEO, Common Cause

Wade Henderson, Executive Director  
Leadership Conference on Civil Rights

Andrew Rice, President,  
UN Association of the National Capital Area
Joslyn Williams, President, Metropolitan Washington Council, AFL-CIO

Hilary O. Shelton
Director, NAACP Washington Bureau

Lorraine Miller
President, DC NAACP

Walter Smith
Executive Director, DC Appleseed Center

Johnny Barnes
Executive Director, ACLU – National Capital Area

Eugenio Arene
Executive Director, Council of Latino Agencies

Kay Maxwell, President, League of Women Voters of the United States

Kim Perry
Director, D.C. Hunger Solutions

Alan Reuther, Legislative Director, International Union, United Automobile, Aerospace & Agricultural Implement Workers (UAW)

Ed Lazere
Executive Director, D.C. Fiscal Policy Institute

Angela Jones
Executive Director, DC Action for Children

Reverend Dean J. Snyder
Pastor, Foundry United Methodist Church

Reverend Clark Lobenstein
Executive Director, InterFaith Conference of Metropolitan Washington

T.J. Sutcliffe
Director of Advocacy and Social Justice, So Others Might Eat