

Testimony of Keshini Ladduwahetty (draft)
Before the Council of the District of Columbia
Committee on Government Operations & the Environment

Regarding

18-769, the “National Popular Vote Interstate Agreement Act of 2010”

May 19, 2010

Thank you, Chairperson Cheh, for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Kesh Ladduwahetty and I live in Ward 3.

I commend you for introducing this farsighted legislation, and I am here today to fully support it. As a long-time activist for full citizenship rights for the people of the District of Columbia, I am too bitterly aware of the imperfections in the original constitution that founded our nation. As an American citizen, I take deep pride in the revolutionary step our country took two centuries ago towards popular sovereignty, establishing standards that most other countries did not attain until the 20th century. Still, because of the very longevity of our democratic heritage, we suffer from 18th century political relics that few other countries endure. One of those relics, is of course, the continued colonial servitude of the people of the District of Columbia. Our constitution is stuck in a past when the District was mostly farmland and swamp, and the people of the District know full well the necessity of updating our political system to accord with our present reality as a vibrant metropolis of 600,000 people.

Similarly, the Electoral College is a relic of the 18th century that we must move beyond. The long-term solution is to change the constitution, but the NPV is a smart strategic solution to adapt this ancient structure to new purpose. The United States is a federal entity, and the natural course of political change bubbles up from the states. The NPV establishes the idea of the popular election of the President one state at a time, while retaining the remnant structure of the Electoral College. Much as

we have adapted the C & O canal, originally built for mule trains and barges, to recreational use for modern hikers and bikers, the NPV adapts the ancient Electoral College to 21st century concepts of popular sovereignty.

The NPV also corrects a blatant injustice perpetuated in the 23rd amendment to the Constitution, which belatedly gave District residents the right to participate in the election of the President, but limited us to the smallest possible number of Electoral College votes, regardless of our population. By basing the election of the President on the popular vote, we will free ourselves from this absurd violation of the principle of one person-one vote.

Finally, I believe the NPV will motivate Presidential candidates to spend more time reaching out to voters in the District of Columbia. Under the current system, Democrats take us completely for granted, while Republicans completely ignore us. Under NPV, given our less than stellar turnout rates, considerable potential exists for driving up turnout of voters of all political parties. Coupled with the fact that Presidential candidates travel frequently to the District, and many actually live here, it is highly likely that they will choose to campaign more in our neighborhoods than ever before.

For all of these reasons, the National Popular Vote would be a great leap forward in democracy for the people of the District of Columbia and the United States. Thank you for your consideration.