

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Rights Group Calls for Human Rights Commission to Examine Disenfranchisement in U.S. Territories and DC

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Equally American and DC Vote, along with co-sponsoring organizations, have requested a thematic hearing before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) on the denial of the right to political participation in U.S. territories and the District of Columbia, Equally American has announced.

The request highlights the disenfranchisement of the nearly 5 million Americans living in DC and the territories – more than 90 percent of whom are racial or ethnic minorities.

The IACHR is a regional human rights mechanism that has authority to monitor compliance by the United States with the American Declaration of the Rights and Duties

of Man, including article XX on the right to political participation. One way in which the IACHR monitors human rights situations in the Americas is by conducting thematic hearings, according to the release. These hearings provide a space in which civil society, government representatives, and the IACHR can engage in cross-cutting dialogue on a specific human rights issue in one or more countries of the Organization of American States.

“An IACHR thematic hearing is an important international forum to raise awareness on these timely and important questions of citizenship and voting rights in U.S. territories,” said Neil Weare, president and founder of Equally American, a nonprofit that advocates for equality and voting rights in U.S. territories. “If the hearing is granted, we will be able to bring together experts and witnesses from across the territories to examine how disenfranchisement has impacted the daily lives of these Americans.”

This is not the first time Equally American has advocated before the IACHR. In 2018, Equally American filed an amicus brief on behalf of leaders from Guam, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and the Northern Mariana Islands in *Rosselló v. United States*, a still-pending IACHR case arguing that the denial of voting rights in Puerto Rico violates the American Declaration. The case builds on *Statehood Solidarity Committee v. United States*, in which the IACHR concluded that the United States had violated its obligations under the American Declaration by failing to provide full political participation to DC residents.

“With the thematic hearing, we will be able to include the IACHR in an even more comprehensive examination of issues facing D.C.,” said Bo Shuff, executive director of DC Vote, which fights for full and equal representation for DC residents. “With Congress currently considering the Washington, DC Admission Act to make the District a State, an IACHR hearing would help shine an international spotlight on the ongoing disenfranchisement residents of DC face.”

If the request is granted, Equally American and DC Vote, along with selected experts and witnesses from the Territories and DC, will present on the issue of political participation during the IACHR’s 177th Period of Sessions between September 28 and October 9, 2020.

The request letter is available [here](#). More info on the IACHR’s 177th Period of Sessions is available [here](#).