



D I S T R I C T O F C O L U M B I A B A R
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Matthew S. Watson, Co-Chair
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Charles R. Lowery, Jr.
Bonnie A. Sullivan
Joshua S. Wyner

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D.C. Bar Assistant Executive
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Carol Ann Cunningham
D.C. Bar Sections Manager

The D.C. Affairs Section of the D.C. Bar¹ writes this letter in support of Bill 14-271, the "Voter Information and Education Act of 2001," currently pending before the Committee on Government Operations. By providing voters with information about candidates and issues before each election, the Council has an opportunity to increase the level of meaningful participation in local affairs by District residents. Simply put, the low cost associated with producing and disseminating the information called for in this bill is a small price to pay to ensure that citizens have reasonable access to basic election information.

The need for residents of the District of Columbia to be given every opportunity to understand fully the issues and candidate positions presented in each election is underscored by District residents' ultimate disenfranchisement. As you know, under the Supreme Court's ruling in Alexander vs. Daly, District residents will have difficulty changing that political reality alone. There is, however, a reality that District residents' duly elected leaders can, even given Congress' role in reviewing all District legislation, affect more or less on their own: improving the management of District elections. And, among the important improvements worth pursuing is to increase access to high-quality voter information before each election.

As a means toward this end, the D.C. Affairs Section of the D.C. Bar applauds the voter education and information bill, particularly the provisions that increase basic information about voting procedures and locations, the views of candidates, and the meaning of initiatives and referenda. Moreover, by providing for translations of this information that make it accessible to non-English speakers and the visually and hearing disabled, the bill would effectively expand the franchise even further. Given the potential costs associated with assembling, printing, and mailing brochures to the District electorate, we are amenable to the possibility of utilizing electronic means of dissemination, making the brochures available at central locations, and other creative ways to hold costs down for the District.

In recent years, the District government has been a leader in elections reform – approving the acquisition and use of new voting machines even before recent controversies during the last presidential election led other local jurisdictions to do the same. Enacting this bill would underscore the Council's dedication to increasing District residents' participation in democracy. We respectfully urge that the Council do so.

¹ The views expressed herein represent only those of the D.C. Affairs Section of the District of Columbia Bar and not those of the District of Columbia Bar or of its Board of Governors. It should be noted that Steering Committee member Grace Lopes recused herself from considering this matter and that the Steering Committee members Joshua Wyner and Thorn Pozen contributed to the preparation of this position.



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February 8, 2002

The Honorable Vincent B. Orange, Sr.
Chairperson,
Committee on Government Operations
Council of the District of Columbia
Suite 117
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20004

Dear Chairperson Orange:

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Sincerely,

Thorn L. Pozen
Matthew Watson
Co-Chairs

cc: The Honorable Linda Cropp
The Honorable Harold Brazil
The Honorable Sharon Ambrose
The Honorable Kathy Patterson
The Honorable Carol Schwartz
The Honorable Anthony Williams