

# [***Biden Sides With Republicans On A Bill To Reverse D.C. Criminal Justice Reforms Here s Why***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:67P7-3J11-JBCM-F3V3-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Highlight:** If Congress passes the bill, it would be the first time in 31 years it voted to overturn a D.C. law.

**Body**

**Topline**

President Joe Biden said he will support a GOP-backed bill that would reverse D.C. s sweeping criminal justice reforms a move that defies some members of his own party but allows him to evade Republican criticism that Democrats are soft on crime and avoid a potentially messier veto fight with Democrats in favor of the reversal.

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President Joe Biden and Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell in Covington, Kentucky on January 04, 2023. (Photo by Peter Zay/Anadolu Agency via Getty Images)

Anadolu Agency via Getty Images

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**Key Facts**

Biden reportedly told Democrats on Thursday he would not veto the resolution if it passes Congress, then explained publicly that while he supports D.C. s ability to self-govern, he opposes some of the provisions in the crime bill, such as lowering penalties for carjackings.

Biden s tweet noted that D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser (D) also vetoed the bill in January, when she said it sent the wrong message on crime prevention, but Bowser was overruled by the City Council and has since said she opposes any interference in our local laws.

The House in February voted 250-173 to reverse the D.C. legislation, with 31 Democrats voting with Republicans; it also voted 260-162, with 42 Democrats in favor, to nullify D.C. legislation that would give non-citizens the right to vote, though Biden has not said where he stands on the latter resolution.

Biden s support for the Congressional resolution that would overrule the D.C. crime reforms is a reversal from his earlier statement saying he opposes the measure, though he did not explicitly say at the time he would veto it.

Some House Democrats said they were surprised and upset by the president s announcement: One anonymous Democratic House member toldThe HillBiden f\*\*\*ed this up royally, and D.C. s nonvoting delegate in Congress, Eleanor Holmes Norton (D),called the decision paternalistic and anti-democratic.

Rep. Peter Aguilar (D-Calif.) told Punchbowl the decision was disappointing and Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY)tweetedthat Biden should respect the people s gov of DC.

White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre defended the president s decision on Friday, telling reporters that vetoing the bill won t make D.C. a state, referring to Biden s pledge that he would back a D.C. statehood bill, while also noting that the D.C. crime reforms reduce maximum sentences for offenses like murders and other homicides, armed-home invasion, burglaries, armed carjackings . . . armed robberies, unlawful gun and some sexual assault offenses.

**Surprising Fact**

Congress has statutory authority over D.C. and reviews all local legislation before it becomes law, but generally allows the council and mayor to self-govern. If the bill to overturn the new criminal justice code passes the Senate it would be the first time since 1991 that Congress voted to reverse a D.C. law.

**Crucial Quote**

It s smart ***politics***. He was running into a buzzsaw, Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.) told reporters on Thursday. You don t want to get left of the D.C. mayor.

**Key Background**

The D.C. Council in November voted to reform the district s criminal laws, a culmination of a 16-year effort to modernize the 122-year-old code. The bill, which takes effect in 2025, reduces penalties and strips away maximum sentencing requirements for some crimes, while giving misdemeanor defendants the right to a jury trial. In addition to injecting more fairness into the criminal justice process, the legislation was also designed to redefine certain crimes by degree of severity and eliminate overlap. Republicans and right-wing pundits promptly billed the legislation as an example of Democrats catering to criminals. Bowser, in vetoing the bill, cited not only its political pitfalls, but also the burden it could place on the courts and police to adapt to the new system.

**Contra**

While the president s decision seems to defy the majority of Congressional Democrats, it also avoids a messy veto fight with senators who do plan to vote in favor. Joe Manchin (D-W.Va.), Angus King (I-Maine) and Bob Casey (D-Pa.) said following the president s announcement that they will back the legislation, which could come before the Senate as early as next week.

**Big Number**

61%. That s the percentage of 5,098 U.S. adults surveyedby Pew Research Centerin October who said violent crime was a top concern for them in making their midterm voting decisions. Republicans seized on the concerns and aired a barrage of negative attack ads against Democratic crime policies in the lead up to the election that cast their opponents as soft on crime. Democrats, meanwhile, made a concerted effort to flip the script by accusing GOP members who are sympathetic to January 6 Capitol rioters of being anti-law enforcement and tying Democratic-backed gun control measures to a reduction in crime. Biden has a generally moderate record on criminal justice reform as a senator, he authored the sweeping 1994 crime bill that aimed to reverse decades of rising crime by enhancing federal sentencing requirements and providing more money to states and localities to hire police and build prisons. The legislation is widely viewed among liberals as a contributor to mass incarceration and the overcrowding of prisons and jails.

**Further Reading**

Biden Bows to Republicans on Blocking D.C. Crime Law, Avoiding Veto Fight (The New York Times)

In a Reversal, Biden Says He ll Sign Republican DC Crime Bill(Bloomberg)

Biden Says He Won t Veto Bill Blocking D.C. Crime Law(The Wall Street Journal)

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