



**COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**  
THE JOHN A. WILSON BUILDING  
1350 PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE, N.W.  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20004

March 7, 2017

The Honorable Jason Chaffetz  
Chairperson, Committee on Oversight & Government Reform  
United States House of Representatives  
2236 Rayburn Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Chairperson Chaffetz:

It has come to our attention that there will be a mark-up of reauthorization of the SOAR Act tomorrow, March 8, 2017. We write as locally elected officials to express our staunch opposition to any expansion of the federally funded school voucher program in the District of Columbia. Rather, the voucher program should be phased out because participation in the program and similar initiatives has not only failed to improve students' academic performance, but worsened it, as found in a series of recent studies. We appreciate your interest in providing support to public education for our constituents, but we strongly believe that financial resources should be invested in the existing public education system – both public schools and public charter schools – rather than diverted to private schools.

Although we believe that students who are already receiving a voucher should have the opportunity to maintain and use that voucher through graduation from high school, we do not support expansion of the program or investments for new students. The District of Columbia devotes considerable funds to public education, and our local policies promote choice for parents. Over the past decade, the quality of public education has increased and continues to rise as a result of reforms and targeted investments. Families can choose from an array of educational institutions based on publicly available performance metrics, both within the D.C. Public Schools system and among the many public charter schools. Our successes allow parents real choices – more than parents in any other locality through transparent performance metrics and a robust school lottery.

We support the phase out of the voucher program. Multiple U.S. Department of Education reports indicate that the program has not lived up to its original goals.<sup>i</sup> In fact, recent studies from voucher programs in Ohio<sup>ii</sup>, Indiana<sup>iii</sup>, and Louisiana<sup>iv</sup> show that public school students who received vouchers to attend private schools scored lower on reading and math assessments. These studies along with two troubling Government Accountability Office reports have also revealed that many of the students in the District of Columbia participating in the voucher program attend private schools with fewer resources and lower standards than our public



schools.<sup>v</sup> The evidence is clear that the use of vouchers has no statistically significant impact on overall student achievement in math or reading.

We have serious concerns about using government funds to send our students to private schools that do not have to adhere to the same standards and accountability as do public and public charter schools. For example, private religious schools, which 80% of students with vouchers attend, operate outside the non-discrimination provisions of the D.C. Human Rights Act. Moreover, the voucher proposal is inequitable: if fully funded, the authorization would provide many more dollars per student for vouchers than is allocated per student in public schools and public charter schools.

We call on you to respect the wishes of the District's elected officials on the quintessentially local matter of education as you consider this issue.


Sincerely,



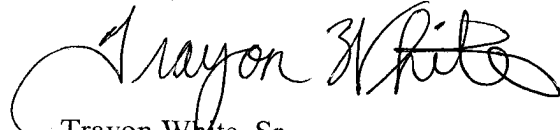
David Grosso  
D.C. Council, At-Large  
Chairperson, Committee on Education



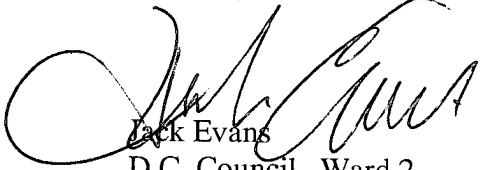
Anita Bonds  
D.C. Council, At-Large  
Member, Committee on Education



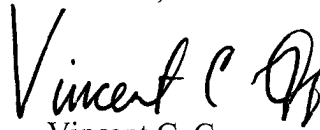
Charles Allen  
D.C. Council, Ward 6  
Member, Committee on Education



Trayon White, Sr.  
D.C. Council, Ward 8  
Member, Committee on Education




Jack Evans  
D.C. Council, Ward 2



Vincent C. Gray  
D.C. Council, Ward 7



Brianne K. Nadeau  
D.C. Council, Ward 1



Elissa Silverman  
D.C. Council, At-Large

<sup>i</sup> U.S. Department of Education, Evaluation of the DC Opportunity Scholarship: Final Report. June 2010 NCEE 2010-4018. Institute of Education Sciences at the National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance. See <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/pubs/20104018/pdf/20104018.pdf>.

<sup>ii</sup> Thomas P. Fordham Institute, Foglio, David and Karbownik, Krzysztof, *Evaluation of Ohio's EdChoice: Selection, Competition, and Performance Ethics*. July 2016. See [https://edex.s3-us-west-1.amazonaws.com/publication/pdfs/FORDHAM%20Ed%20Choice%20Evaluation%20Report\\_online%20edition.pdf](https://edex.s3-us-west-1.amazonaws.com/publication/pdfs/FORDHAM%20Ed%20Choice%20Evaluation%20Report_online%20edition.pdf)

<sup>iii</sup> Brookings Institute, Evidence Speaks Reports. Dynarski, Matt, *On Negative Effects of Vouchers* Vol.1, #18 May 26, 2016. See <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/vouchers-and-test-scores.pdf>.

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<sup>iv</sup> Education Research Alliance for New Orleans. Mills, Jonathan N., Egalite, Anna J., and Wolf, Patrick J., *How was the Louisiana Scholarship Program Affected Students? A Comprehensive Summary of Effects after Two Years* February 22, 2016. See <http://educationresearchalliancenaola.org/files/publications/ERA-Policy-Brief-Public-Private-School-Choice-160218.pdf>

<sup>v</sup> United States Government Accountability Office Report to the Chairman, Subcommittee on Financial Services and General Government, Committee on Appropriations, U.S. Senate. *District of Columbia Opportunity Scholarship Program: Actions Needed to Address Weaknesses in Administration and Oversight*. September 2013. See <http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-13-805>