



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

September 13, 2023

Representative Kay Granger
Chair, Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
2308 Rayburn Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Representative Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member, Committee on
Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
2413 Rayburn Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chair, Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
154 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Susan Collins
Vice Chair, Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
413 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chair Granger, Ranking Member DeLauro, Chair Murray, and Vice Chair Collins:

We write as locally elected officials to express our staunch opposition to the current proposal in the House FY24 Financial Services and General Government Appropriations (FSGG) bill to reauthorize the Scholarships for Opportunity and Results (SOAR) Act, which solely impacts the District of Columbia. We are particularly concerned about the provision that would decrease the amount of federal dollars provided to the District's public schools and dramatically increase the amount provided to the federally funded school voucher program in DC.

For two decades, Congress has provided equal federal funds to three education sectors in the District of Columbia under the SOAR Act: DC Public Schools, DC public charter schools, and a school voucher program. Now, the House Appropriations Committee has advanced a measure that would cut public school funding to one-sixth of funding provided for DC schools improvement and increase voucher funding to half the total provided. In sum, this proposal would strip approximately \$8.75 million per year from DC's public education system and funnel it to private schools instead, despite the fact that the SOAR Act's voucher program has been shown to be unsuccessful and unaccountable. This proposal is deeply misguided and will harm our constituents.

We appreciate Congress's interest in supporting education for our constituents through the SOAR Act. But we believe in robust investment in the public education system – both traditional public schools and public charter schools – rather than diverting funds to private schools. And although we believe that District students who are already receiving a voucher should have the opportunity to maintain that voucher through graduation of the school they are currently attending, we do not support a full-scale expansion of the program.

The past decade has brought significant improvement in DC public education thanks to reforms and targeted investments. We devote considerable funds to public education, and our local policies promote choice for parents. Families can choose from an array of quality educational institutions based on publicly available performance metrics, both within the DC Public Schools system and among the District’s many public charter schools. Our successes allow parents real choices – more than parents in any other locality—through transparent performance metrics and a robust public school lottery. Yet the House’s proposal to expand SOAR Act vouchers will directly undermine these choices to fund ineffective and discriminatory private school vouchers.

Two recent U.S. Department of Education studies of the SOAR Act voucher program demonstrate that students using vouchers are performing worse academically than their peers who are not in the program.¹ In fact, this negative impact on student performance is on par with the learning loss attributed to Hurricane Katrina.² This is consistent with recent studies from other voucher programs in Ohio,³ Indiana,⁴ and Louisiana,⁵ which show that public school students who received vouchers to attend private schools experienced declines in their reading and math scores. These studies—along with two troubling Government Accountability Office reports—have also revealed that many of the students in the SOAR Act voucher program attend private schools with fewer resources and lower standards than DC public schools.⁶

We also have serious concerns about using government funds to send DC students to private schools that do not have to adhere to the same nondiscrimination laws and public accountability standards as do traditional public schools and public charter schools. For example, private religious schools, which 80% of students with vouchers attend, operate outside the nondiscrimination provisions of the DC Human Rights Act. And students who attend private schools with vouchers are stripped of other constitutional and statutory rights provided to them in public schools. This is particularly troubling for students with disabilities, who often attend private schools that do not have to follow an Individualized Education Program or provide the same access, accommodations, and services to students with disabilities that they would get in public schools.

As you consider this issue, we call on you to respect the wishes of the elected officials of the Council of the District of Columbia on the quintessentially local matter of education. Please reject this reauthorization of the SOAR Act in its current form.

¹ U.S. Dep’t of Educ., [Evaluation of the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program: Impacts Two Years After Students Applied](#) (June 2018); U.S. Dep’t of Educ., [Evaluation of the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program: Impacts After One Year](#) (June 2017).

² Nat’l Coalition for Public Educ., [Voucher Impacts on Academic Achievement](#) (2023).

³ David Figlio & Krzysztof Karbownik, [Evaluation of Ohio’s EdChoice Scholarship Program: Selection, Competition, & Performance Effects](#), Fordham Inst. (July 2016).

⁴ R. Joseph Waddington & Mark Berends, [Impact of the Indiana Choice Scholarship Program: Achievement Effects for Students in Upper Elementary & Middle School](#), 37 *J. of Policy Analysis & Mgmt.* 4, 738-808 (Aug. 2018).

⁵ Atila Abdulkadiroğlu, Parag A. Pathak & Christopher R. Walters, [Free to Choose: Can School Choice Reduce Student Achievement?](#), 10 *Am. Econ. Journal: Applied Econ.* 1, 175-206 (Jan. 2018).

⁶ U.S. Gov’t Accountability Office, [District of Columbia Opportunity Scholarship Program: Actions Needed to Address Weaknesses in Administration & Oversight](#), Publication No. GAO-13-805 (Nov. 2013).

Sincerely,



Christina Henderson
D.C. Council, At-Large



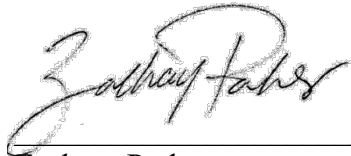
Anita Bonds
D.C. Council, At-Large



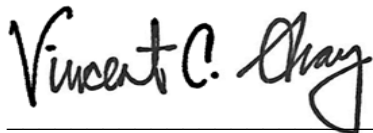
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Matthew Frumin
D.C. Council, Ward 3




Zachary Parker
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