



D.C. CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

ADVANCING GOSPEL VALUES IN THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Post Office Box 29260, Washington, D.C. 20017-0260

Honorable Jason Chaffetz
Chairman, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

October 8, 2015

Dear Chairman Chaffetz,

The D.C. Catholic Conference, which represents the public policy interests of the Archdiocese of Washington, urges you and your committee to vote in support of the Scholarships for Opportunity and Results Act (SOAR) of 2015 (H.R. 10) reauthorizing the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program

Since 2004, the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program has been a popular and effective program providing a quality private school education to 6,200 low-income children within the District of Columbia.

The majority of these students come from single parent families in which the average household income is roughly \$22,000 per year. Nearly half of the students live in the most economically challenged areas of the city (Wards 7 and 8) and almost all of them, 99.7 percent, would otherwise be zoned in a "School in Need of Improvement" according to the U.S. Department of Education. Ninety-eight percent of participating children are African-American and Hispanic. Ninety-two percent of the current participants expressed their satisfaction with the program.

According to the Department's Institute for Education Sciences (2010), 91 percent of the scholarship students graduated from high school --- 21 percent higher than those children who applied but did not receive a scholarship and remained in the city's public schools. Even the Children Youth Investment Trust Corporation reports that participants have an average high school graduation rate of 93 percent and 90 percent college enrollment rate for those graduates between 2010 and 2012.

It is important to note that the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program is part of a three-sector program that also includes \$60 million to be evenly divided among the city's public schools, public charter schools and scholarship program for low-income families to use at non-public schools. As such, parents in the nation's capital would continue to have the option of selecting a school that best fits the educational needs of their children.

No child should be denied this opportunity to receive a quality education because of their family income or zip code. I urge you and your colleagues to pass the SOAR Act.

Sincerely,

Michael Scott
Director, D.C. Catholic Conference