

TESTIMONY OF LATASHA BENNETT

House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform Subcommittee on Health Care, District of Columbia, Census and the National Archives

MARCH 1, 2011

Chairman Gowdy and Members of the Committee: thank you for allowing me to share my family's story regarding the need for the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program to be reauthorized.

My name is LaTasha Bennett; I am a thirty-nine year old, single mother of two very intelligent children. My son Nico Thomas is nine years old and attends Naylor Road Private School, where he is in the fourth grade and where he is excelling. My daughter Nia Thomas is six years old and she also attends Naylor Road, thanks to generous private donations which we have truly been blessed to receive. Without these donations, I do not know where my daughter would be going to school. I am currently unemployed due to a disability. I worked from the age of 14 until I became disabled in 2000. Because of my inability to work, the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program has been a true blessing for my son and our family

Nico is thriving academically in his school and loving it. The students in Nico's class get more hands-on teaching from the teacher because there are only nine students in his class. Students are given so much more attention and they learn twice as much in their classes. I don't want to see my son's dreams of becoming a doctor washed down the drain because he is forced to attend a school that does not meet his needs.

I applied for a scholarship for Nia so she could attend Naylor Road School for the 2009-10 school year. I had received a letter of approval granting Nia a scholarship and I was so elated. Then about a month or two later, a retraction letter came. It was like a nightmare. I teach my children to live by the law, but I felt like the system had failed my

baby before she even got a chance to begin her dreams. I was totally devastated and angry that my child was denied an opportunity to attend, along with her brother, a school where she would be safe and get a quality education. Why shouldn't my child be given the same opportunity as your children to get the best education possible? Is my child not worthy of getting what so many of our ancestors fought for years ago?

My daughter has dreams of being a famous dancer and singer, and I want to motivate her dreams because as long as she has a dream there is a chance for a better future. I want Nia to have the opportunity to excel as well as her brother. Nia is so looking forward to going to college in the future and she continues to ask me "Mom, will I go to my school with my brother next year?" I use to answer her and tell her "yes". Now I don't know what to tell her. I know that I cannot count on private donations to send Nia to Naylor Road for the remainder of her time in school. But when you look at your child, and see she is so happy, you can't bring yourself to express doubt. I believe you, Chairman Gowdy, and the members of this committee know how it feels when your child is so happy their little face lights up and you can't bring yourself to cause that light to go out. We are looking to those who have the power to do so to continue this program and assure that our children have the opportunity to get the type of education they deserve.

Without the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program, I do not have the peace of mind to know, truly, where I will send my daughter to school. I know for certain it will not be any schools in my area. I have seen what happens to children in my neighborhood when they fall through the cracks. I saw my nephew die. I will not lose my babies when they are so bright and willing to learn and be productive citizens. Please allow my children the opportunity to have a bright and better future by continuing this program.

Education is the #1 priority in my household and by reauthorizing the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program, so many parents, like me, will have **HOPE** for our children to succeed. Please allow this program to continue for as long as possible; for as many as possible. . Our children's future depends on this wonderful opportunity. They

have bright goals for their future, so please allow them this chance to make them all come true.

We sincerely appreciate your commitment to our children's education. **Our children are the future**, and without the proper education what type of future will they have? I thank you and so do Nico and Nia in advance, because we know that all of you know that education is the key to their success and we believe you will make the right decision.

Thank you.

Latasha Bennett

Bio

Latasha Bennett is a single 39 year old mother of two wonderful children. Born and raised in Washington, DC, she has tried hard to make sure her children are provided for especially with their education. Her son Nico Thomas is nine years old, and receives a D.C. Opportunity Scholarship to attend the school she chose for him where he is in the fourth grade and excelling. She also has a six-year-old daughter, Nia Thomas who by the grace of GOD attends the same school at the present time thanks to donations that her family receives. Were it not for the donations Latasha does not know where Nia would be going to school now.

Nia was 1 of the 216, that in 2009 Secretary of Education Arne Duncan retracted the scholarships that they were awarded. Latasha was angry and heartbroken because at that time Nia was ready to go to school with her brother and also start her path towards a better future. At the last minute, it was like a nightmare, when she read that retraction letter she could not hold back the tears, not having a clue as to what she was going do next. All parents want the BEST for their children. The D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program gives Latasha hope and the opportunity for a better future for her children.

Latasha qualifies for the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program because she is currently unemployed due to a disability. She hopes that the D.C. OSP will continue to show that low-income children can excel when given the opportunity to attend a quality educational environment.

Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
Witness Disclosure Requirement – “Truth in Testimony”
Required by House Rule XI, Clause 2(g)(5)

Name: LaTasha Bennett

1. Please list any federal grants or contracts (including subgrants or subcontracts) you have received since October 1, 2008. Include the source and amount of each grant or contract.

N/A

2. Please list any entity you are testifying on behalf of and briefly describe your relationship with these entities.

N/A

3. Please list any federal grants or contracts (including subgrants or subcontracts) received since October 1, 2008, by the entity(ies) you listed above. Include the source and amount of each grant or contract.

N/A

I certify that the above information is true and correct.

Signature: LaTasha Bennett

Date: 2-25-2011