

TESTIMONY OF SHEILA D. JACKSON

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 the opportunity to speak before you today.

I am a single parent of two. I have a fifteen year old daughter who is and has been a recipient of the Opportunity Scholarship for six years.

I was educated in the south and experienced racism firsthand. I attended segregated schools until I began high school. I prayed that when I became a mother my child/ren would never have to experience racism on the level I did.

As a young girl I remember waking up in the middle of the night to screaming neighbors because a cross was burning on their lawn. I also have memories of being told I could not use the restroom in public buildings while out shopping with my mother because I was not the appropriate skin color, watching the Klu Klux Klan parading in our neighborhood just because they could. The list goes on. But

in spite of all the racial negativity surrounding me I vowed that I would not let it hamper my growth and that when I had children I would provide the best that I could and that they would have the best education possible.

In spite of all my efforts my daughter now faces another form of segregation to segregate her from attending a school of my choice and that is best suited for her just because some politicians feel that my child and many others who are currently recipients of the Opportunity Scholarship do not deserve the quality education their children receive. Why? That's a question we parents would all like an answer to. I am disabled and live on a fixed income. If this program is not reauthorized it would be impossible for me to pay tuition to the private Christian school my daughter currently attends. The Opportunity Scholarship Program has been the difference to her having to attend schools that are not safe and are still underperforming to her now attending a school that meets her needs and where I know she is safe. My daughter attended DC Public Schools through fourth grade. I was not pleased with the overcrowded classrooms, teachers having to share teacher aides, purchase school supplies with their own money, children so unruly the police had to be called because they were a threat to the rest of the student body

During her fourth grade year I had taken as much as I could. Shawnee was struggling in math and her teacher was not willing to do anything outside of her plan to help my daughter. We went back and forth, with her teacher accusing me

of trying to run classroom. She blatantly told me that if my daughter did not get it than she was sorry. I agreed with her that she was sorry if she was not willing to do what she was there for to educate the students in her charge. I was determined that I would not allow this school system to fail my child and I knew that if she continued in the DC Public School System that would surely be the case. The school she attended was an underperforming school as were most of the schools in my ward. I requested a meeting with the principle and that meeting was granted.

In attendance were her teacher, the principle and myself. After hearing from her teacher and myself he was in agreement with me that her teacher was not doing enough to help my daughter. I learned about tutoring options for low income families under the No Child Left Behind Program, I applied for my daughter and she was accepted.

After an assessment of her by the tutor it was discovered that she was intimidated by math. Ms. Johns her tutor who is currently a Professor at the University of Oklahoma, worked with my daughter through the remainder of the school year. There was a tremendous improvement in her math grades.

That was her last year in the DC Public School System. During that year I learned about and applied for the Opportunity Scholarship and Shawnee was accepted. She is now a sophomore in high school attending the The Preparatory School of DC, an honor roll student and making plans for college.

Not only has the OSP provided me a choice for my daughter, but also for thousands of other parents. I stand today asking that the Opportunity Scholarship Program be reauthorized and be opened to new students as well.

My motto is simple “Walk Good and Journey Safe”, that our children will continue to be afforded the opportunity to have a good walk through their education and all their educational journeys be safe.

Thank You

Sheila Jackson

BIO

A native of Elizabeth City, North Carolina Sheila Jackson was raised by Shirley Copelin and Arthur Copelin, Jr. Shirley was assistant to the principal at H. L. Trigg Elementary School where Sheila attended and Arthur was a mortician. They both had strong educational values and instilled in their children to work hard and strive for the highest goals.

Sheila's mother Shirley recited faithfully every morning to her girls the golden rule "do unto others as you would have them do unto you". This has been a rule that Sheila continues to live by daily. Educated in North Carolina, Sheila moved to this area in the late seventies. She is the mother of two children and has instilled her children the values and morals she received from her parents.

Sheila was employed with West Group until becoming disabled. She now devotes a great portion of her days advocating for school choice and volunteering at her daughter's school teaching bible class. She is an active member of Imani Temple African American Catholic Congregation and serves as the National Chief of the Ministry of Cantors.

Her daughter, Shawnee, is an D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program recipient and is in 10th grade at Preparatory School of DC. She is doing extremely well and looking toward the future.

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

Name:

Sheila Jackson

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

Sheila Jackson

02-25-2011

I certify that the above information is true and correct.

Signature:

Date: