



AMERICAN FEDERATION *for Children*

October 7, 2015

The Honorable Jason Chaffetz
Chairman, House Oversight and
Government Reform Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Chaffetz:

I am writing to urge the Committee's support for HR 10, the *Scholarships for Results and Opportunity Act of 2015*. This bill will reauthorize and strengthen the highly successful D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program (OSP).

This is the 11th year for this incredible program, which has been an educational lifeline for nearly 6,200 children from very low-income D.C. families since it began in the 2004-2005 school year. Since 2010, the OSP has shown a 90 percent graduation rate for students using a scholarship and a near 90 percent college enrollment for those graduates. According to the last U.S. Department of Education Institute for Education Sciences (IES) report (2010), 91 percent of children who used their opportunity scholarships graduated from high school, 21 percent higher than those who applied, but did not receive a scholarship. There was also a statistically significant increase in reading scores according to a 2013 summary article published by the first OSP federal evaluation team in the *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, a top scientific peer reviewed publication.

The success in educational outcomes for OSP students is complemented by the fact that the program serves low-income families with an average income of less than \$22,000 per year and more than 97 percent of participants are African-American or Hispanic. In addition, 88 percent of participating students would otherwise be zoned for a public school in need of improvement.

The demand for the OSP also remains very strong. More than 16,000 families have applied to participate in the OSP since 2004 and many of the thousands of D.C. families currently on charter school waiting lists would no doubt want to explore the OSP as an option.

HR 10 will reauthorize the OSP for five years and strengthen the program. While current law states income eligibility as the criteria for entry into the program, HR 10 will strengthen the language to ensure that all eligible families, including siblings of existing children, are eligible, with the top priority remaining children from low achieving public schools. HR 10 will add

background checks for school employees who directly interact with students and will require those few participating schools not already accredited to do so within five years. HR 10 will make it clear that unobligated funds from previous fiscal years should be used for new scholarships and not more than 5 percent of those funds can be used for administration, parent engagement, or tutoring assistance in addition to the amounts appropriated for those purposes.

Importantly, HR 10 will also change the federally mandated evaluation of the program from a study requiring a “control group” (those seeking but not awarded scholarships) to one that will compare those receiving scholarships with similarly situated children in public schools. OSP students who were part of the previous study will be transitioned into the new study. Both studies are scientifically valid, but the new study will no longer require a control group, thereby allowing eligible children who had previously been prohibited from entering the program the same opportunity to enroll. Moreover, the new evaluation will include all students participating in the program, and not just new participants who won a lottery, so it will be more comprehensive than previous studies.

Washington, D.C. is an excellent example of parental choice at work. Parents get to choose traditional public schools, charters or the OSP, and this has helped to improve K-12 education in the District. AFC is committed to ensuring that every child – no matter their zip code or family income – has access to a quality education. Reauthorizing the OSP will ensure that low-income families in D.C. will continue to have access to this successful program. We urge the Committee to support HR 10 and move this legislation to the floor.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "John Schilling". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "John" and the last name "Schilling" connected.

John Schilling
Chief Operating Officer
American Federation for Children