

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

March 17, 2016

The Honorable Harold Rogers
Chairman
House Committee on Appropriations
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Nita M. Lowey
Ranking Minority Member
House Committee on Appropriations
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Ander Crenshaw
Chairman
Subcommittee on Financial Services
and General Government
House Committee on Appropriations
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable José E. Serrano
Ranking Minority Member
Subcommittee on Financial Services
and General Government
House Committee on Appropriations
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Rogers, Ranking Member Lowey, Chairman Crenshaw, and Ranking Member Serrano:

On October 21, 2015, the U.S. House of Representatives passed the Scholarships for Opportunity and Results (SOAR) Reauthorization Act, H.R. 10, with bipartisan support. The bill—originally sponsored and developed by former Speaker John Boehner—will bring broader educational opportunities to low-income students in Washington, D.C.

Since its passage, Members of the House have worked with our colleagues in the Senate to further refine the SOAR Reauthorization Act. Using H.R. 10 as a base vehicle, we have developed a bipartisan, bicameral compromise that we urge you to include in the fiscal year 2017 Financial Services and General Government Appropriations bill. SOAR Act authorization language has historically been included in appropriations bills, dating back to 2004.

This reauthorization continues the “three-sector” approach to educational reform in Washington, D.C. The three-sector approach consists of providing school improvement funding for D.C. public schools and charter schools, and resources for the Opportunity Scholarship Program (OSP). The OSP allows students from low-income families residing in D.C. to receive scholarship funds to attend D.C. private schools of their choice. Under the SOAR Reauthorization Act, each sector would receive \$20 million annually for five years.

Students who have received scholarships through the OSP graduate at significantly higher rates than their public school counterparts. While D.C. public schools saw a 64 percent graduation rate for the 2014 to 2015 school year, OSP students average a 90 percent graduation rate, with 88 percent of OSP graduates enrolling in college.

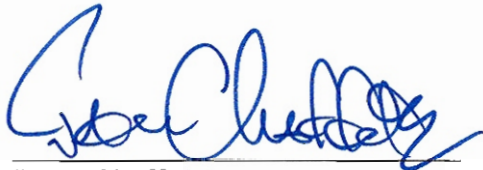
The program brings opportunities to the families who need them the most. The average OSP family is making less than \$22,000 per year. These families deserve the opportunity to send their children to a school of their choice.

The SOAR Act is at risk of not being reauthorized, which would mean restricting educational opportunities for students in D.C. Leaders within the District government have actively requested that Congress continue to authorize and appropriate funding under the SOAR Act. In a March 2016 letter to congressional leadership, D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser and eight members of the D.C. Council urged Congress to pass the SOAR Reauthorization Act.¹ The letter states, “we support the three-sector federal funding approach for DC’s K-12 education system.”² While some mistakenly believe that SOAR funding somehow threatens public school funding in the District, this letter correctly points out that, “This funding is provided via our DC federal payments and does not take away from our state formula funding for education; rather, it adds to it.”³ The letter continues to identify the many ways SOAR funding has benefited the District.

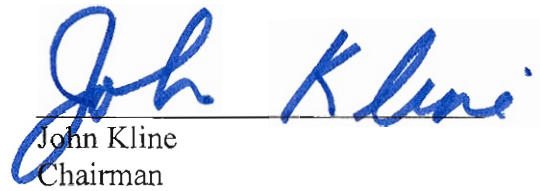
Funding the SOAR Act has strong local support as it will allow for continued improvements in D.C. education. We urge you to stand with us, Mayor Bowser, and a majority of the D.C. Council in supporting the inclusion of the bipartisan, bicameral reauthorization language of the SOAR Act in the fiscal year 2017 Financial Services and General Government Appropriations bill.

Thank you for considering our request. If you have questions, please contact Chris D’Angelo or Maggie Childs of the Oversight Committee staff at (202) 225-5074. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



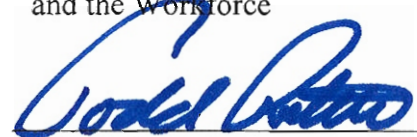
Jason Chaffetz
Chairman
Committee on Oversight
and Government Reform



John Kline
Chairman
Committee on Education
and the Workforce



Mark Meadows
Member of Congress



Todd Rokita
Member of Congress



Luke Messer
Member of Congress

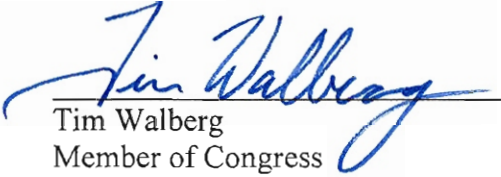


Daniel Lipinski
Member of Congress

¹ Letter from Muriel Bowser, Mayor, District of Columbia, Phil Mendelson, Chairman, District of Columbia Council, et al., to Mitch McConnell, Maj. Leader, U.S. Sen., Paul Ryan, Speaker, U.S. H.R., Harry Reid, Min. Leader, U.S. Sen., Nancy Pelosi, Min. Leader, U.S. H.R. (March 7, 2016).

² *Id.*

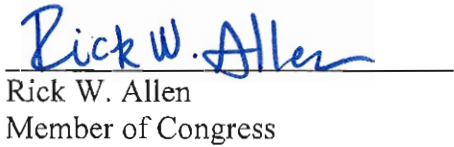
³ *Id.*



Tim Walberg
Member of Congress



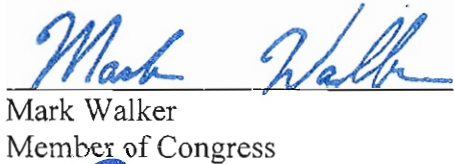
Glenn 'GT' Thompson
Member of Congress



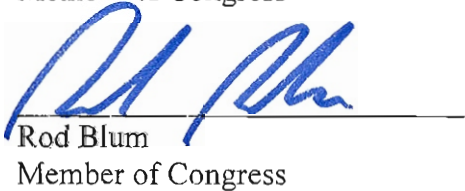
Rick W. Allen
Member of Congress



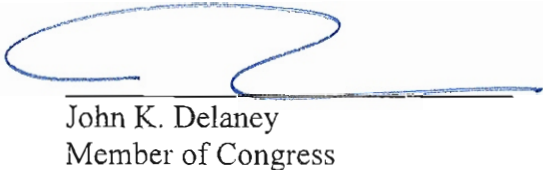
Trent Franks
Member of Congress



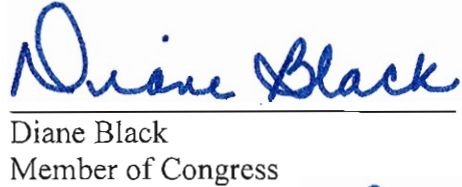
Mark Walker
Member of Congress



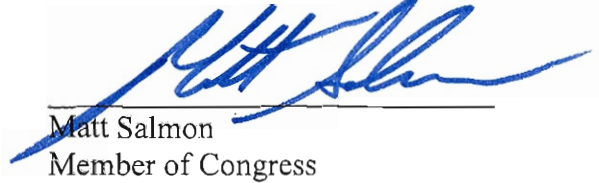
Rod Blum
Member of Congress



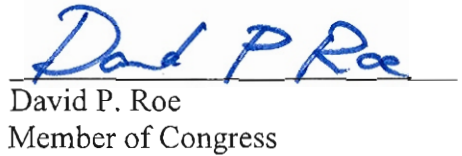
John K. Delaney
Member of Congress



Diane Black
Member of Congress



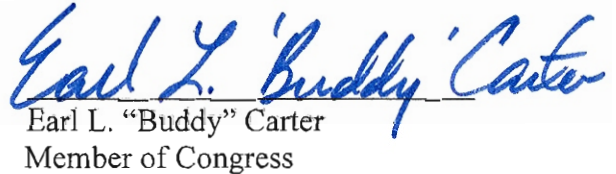
Matt Salmon
Member of Congress



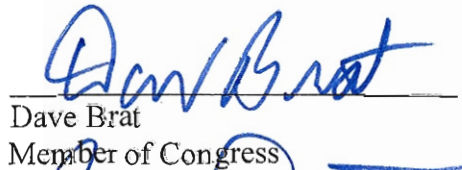
David P. Roe
Member of Congress



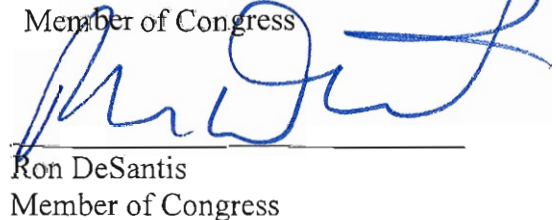
Blake Farenthold
Member of Congress



Earl L. "Buddy" Carter
Member of Congress



Dave Brat
Member of Congress



Ron DeSantis
Member of Congress

cc: The Honorable Paul D. Ryan, Speaker of the House
The Honorable Kevin McCarthy, House Majority Leader
The Honorable Nancy Pelosi, House Minority Leader