

COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
KWAME R. BROWN, CHAIRMAN
1350 PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE, NW
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20004
(202) 724-8032

February 28, 2011

The Honorable Joseph I. Lieberman

The Honorable Susan M. Collins

The Honorable Darrell Issa

The Honorable Elijah Cummings

Dear Honorable Members:

We, the undersigned members of the Council of the District of Columbia, write you to express our support for reauthorization of the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program (OSP) as part of the federal three-sector investment in D.C. education. This three-sector initiative has brought in nearly \$400 million for D.C. public schools, public charter schools, and the OSP for educational improvement in our city since 2004. At a time when the city's finances are so strained, we must make every effort to ensure this federal funding continues for all three sectors. The OSP is a vital part, ensuring that thousands of District children and their parents have maximum options for access to educational opportunity. We must keep every option on the table for low-income families. We cannot and should not take options away from these families.

Because of the OSP, more than 3,300 children from very low-income families have received scholarships to attend participating private schools in the District. The average income for a participating family is less than \$25,000 per year and more than 90 percent of the children would otherwise be in a school in need of improvement. The positive results of this program – according to five years of Institute of Education Sciences study and four reports out of Georgetown and the University of Arkansas – are not in dispute. Children are making academic progress, they are graduating at very high rates, parents are overwhelmingly satisfied, and the program is serving those families most in need.

As city leaders, we support our public schools and the efforts to get our public schools to the point where they are providing an outstanding education for every child. Indeed, this is the front line of educational reform and demands are attention first. This will take time to accomplish and, in the meantime, we compliment broader reforms by expanding educational choice right now. Failing to



reauthorize the Opportunity Scholarship Program and preventing new children from entering is unfair and injurious to the hopes, dreams, and aspirations of these low-income families.

More than 9,000 families have applied to participate in the OSP since the inception of the program. Nearly 8,000 D.C. residents signed a petition supporting the OSP. We have seen the rallies of thousands in front of the Wilson Building and the Capitol urging city, congressional, and executive branch leaders to preserve this option for D.C. children. Their voices must be heard.

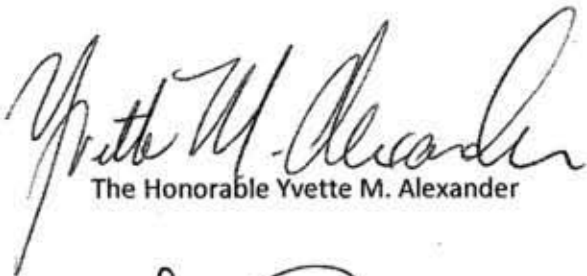
We strongly support the reauthorization of the Opportunity Scholarship Program as part of a continuing federal three-sector investment in D.C. education.

Sincerely,



The Honorable Kwame R. Brown

Chairman, Council of the District of Columbia



The Honorable Yvette M. Alexander



The Honorable Marion S. Barry



The Honorable Muriel Bowser



The Honorable Sekou Biddle



The Honorable Harry Thomas Jr.