



Committee on Catholic Education

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March 3, 2016

The Honorable Paul Ryan
Speaker of the House
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Majority Leader
Washington, D.C. 20510

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

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Chairman
Senate Appropriations Committee
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Ander Crenshaw
Chairman, House Appropriations
Financial Services Subcommittee
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable John Boozman
Chairman, Senate Appropriations
Financial Services Subcommittee
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Representatives and Senators:

I write you today on behalf of the Committee on Catholic Education of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops to urge inclusion of the language of HR 10, the *Scholarships for Results and Opportunity Act of 2015*, and full funding for the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program (OSP) in the base text of the FY 2017 Financial Services and General Government Appropriations bill. HR 10 will reauthorize and strengthen this highly successful program that benefits all families who have students in public, charter, and private schools in D.C.

2016 marks the twelfth year for this impactful program, which has been an educational lifeline for nearly 6,400 children from low-income D.C. families since it began in the 2004-2005 school year. This is illustrated by the following facts:

Better Educational Outcomes

- 90+ percent graduation rate for students using a scholarship and 90 percent college enrollment.
- Graduation rates for children using an OSP scholarship are 30 points higher than D.C. public schools.

Serving Children Most In Need

- Average income for participating families is less than \$22,000 per year.
- Eighty-eight percent of participating children would otherwise be zoned for a school in need of improvement.
- Ninety-seven percent of participating children are African-American or Hispanic.

Strong Demand

- More than 16,000 families have applied to participate in the OSP since its inception.
- Many of the low-income families on charter school waiting lists want access to the OSP.

The OSP has demonstrably improved educational outcomes for children in low-income families.

For nearly 150 years, the Catholic Church has unequivocally taught that parents have the right and responsibility to serve as the primary educators of their children. To assist them in this sacred duty, the Church has articulated clearly that children have the universal right to an education, and the state has a fundamental obligation to support parents in fulfilling such a right. In the 1965 Declaration on Christian Education (*Gravissimum Educationis*), the Second Vatican Council reiterated, “Parents who have the primary and inalienable right and duty to educate their children must enjoy true liberty in their choice of schools. Consequently, the public power, which has the obligation to protect and defend the rights of citizens, must see to it, in its concern for distributive justice, that public subsidies are paid out in such a way that parents are truly free to choose according to their conscience in the schools they want for their children.”

We urge you to include the text of HR 10 and full funding for the three-sector initiative for school improvement in Washington, D.C. in the base text of the FY 2017 Financial Services and General Government Appropriations bill.

With prayerful best wishes,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "George J. Lucas". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend George J. Lucas
Archbishop of Omaha
Chairman, Committee on Catholic Education