



December 11, 2015

The Honorable Paul Ryan  
Speaker  
United States House of Representatives

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Minority Leader  
United States House of Representatives

The Honorable Harry Reid  
Minority Leader  
United States Senate

Dear Majority Leader McConnell, Minority Leader Reid, Speaker Ryan, and Minority Leader Pelosi,

We are aware that you are now considering a very important matter to District of Columbia school kids and families. We are writing to ask that you include the *SOAR Reauthorization Act* (H.R.10/S. 2171) in the FY2016 Omnibus Appropriations Bill. The Senate version of the bill in its current form includes some very important improvements related to the Opportunity Scholarship Program. It is this version of the bill that we urge you to include in the omnibus.

The *SOAR Reauthorization Act* authorizes critical education funding for the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) and public charter schools that has helped greatly in improving the District's education system. Without the reauthorization of the SOAR Act, the District risks losing \$30 million per year from its public education system which would create a difficult budgetary gap for the city to fill.

The SOAR Act is a three-pronged investment in DC school kids: \$15 million for the Opportunity Scholarships, \$15 million for DC Public Schools, and \$15 million for DC public charter schools. The \$30 million for public education that the District receives as a result of the SOAR Act is ***in addition to*** our state formula funding and is paid for through a separate federal payment that DC receives each year. The voucher program does not take away from education funding in the District. On the contrary, it adds to it.

This program needs to be reauthorized for another five years to safeguard the continued federal funding for DCPS and DC public charter schools authorized in the SOAR Act. It has helped tremendously to achieve many recent successes in the District's education system including the following:

- This fall's release of scores on the Nation's Report Card, the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP), showed that the District has outpaced the nation in reading and math.

- The NAEP showed that the District achieved the biggest gains of any state in fourth grade reading.
- The District of Columbia Public Schools is the fastest-improving urban school district in the country, according to the 2015 Trial Urban District Assessment.
- DCPS recently experienced a six percent increase in graduation rates.

The SOAR Act provides crucial support for our education system at a time when DC is experiencing unprecedented improvement in outcomes for children across DCPS and public charter schools. This is not the time to interrupt the critical investments that have been made in education in Washington, DC.

Again, we urge you to reauthorize this important program for schoolchildren in the District of Columbia.

Sincerely,



Muriel Bowser  
Mayor



Phil Mendelson  
Chairman of the Council

Cc: The Honorable Thad Cochran, Chairman, United States Senate Committee on Appropriations Committee  
The Honorable Barbara Mikulski, Vice Chair, United States Senate Committee on Appropriations  
The Honorable Harold Rogers, Chairman, United States House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations  
The Honorable Nita Lowey, Ranking Member, United States House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations