



MURIEL BOWSER
MAYOR

MAR - 7 2016

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate

The Honorable Harry Reid
Minority Leader
United States Senate

The Honorable Paul Ryan
Speaker
United States House of Representatives

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives

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

As Mayor and members of the Council of the District of Columbia, we support the three-sector federal funding approach for DC's K-12 education system that is authorized in the *Scholarships for Opportunities and Results (SOAR) Act*. Our support for the SOAR Act is rooted in the importance we place on the much-needed federal funding for DC Public Schools (DCPS) and public charter schools which totaled \$30 million in FY2016. 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. A reauthorization of the SOAR Act would help safeguard \$150 million in federal funds for DCPS and public charter schools over five years. These funds are critical to the gains that the District's public education system has seen in recent years.

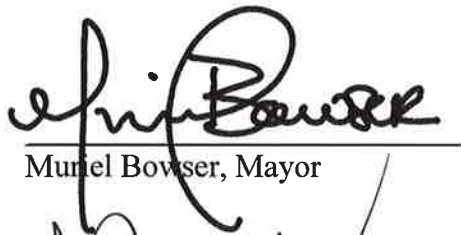
In addition, we are very concerned about a bill that was recently introduced in Congress, the *Educational Freedom Accounts Act* (H.R. 4426/S. 2455), which would require the District of Columbia to re-direct local funds from DCPS and the public charter schools toward Educational Savings Accounts for DC students who want to attend private schools. This bill would be harmful to the District's progress on education and we strongly oppose it. SOAR Act reauthorization is far a better alternative and works for our families and school system.

SOAR Act funding for DCPS has been used to support initiatives that reward and increase retention of high performing teachers and principals. The funds also help attract more high quality teachers and principals to DCPS and to improve the efficiency with which schools are run. After years of decline, DCPS enrollment is rising for the first time in decades. Schools that previously struggled to fill their pre-kindergarten seats have waiting lists and other schools are attracting families back into the system at grade levels that have historically lost students.

Public charter schools in the District represent 44 percent of the public school population of more than 85,000 students with 62 public charter schools on 115 campuses. Since FY2004, federal funds authorized in the SOAR Act have supported the acquisition, renovation, modernization, and expansion of charter school facilities in the District. These funds have also been used to improve academic achievement, teacher and leader quality and recruitment, instructional support, and graduation pathways.

The SOAR Act provides equal amounts of federal funding for the DCPS, public charter schools and the OSP. We understand that these funding streams are inextricably linked. We urge you to ensure that the *SOAR Reauthorization Act* (S. 2171/H.R. 10) becomes law before the end of this Congress so that this critical funding for K-12 education in the District of Columbia is not put in jeopardy.

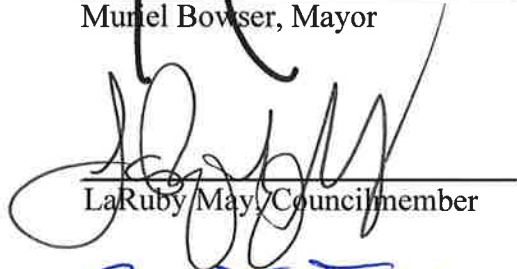
Sincerely,



Muriel Bowser, Mayor



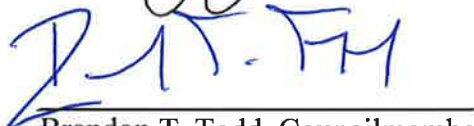
Phil Mendelson, Chairman



LaRuby May, Councilmember




Vincent Orange, Councilmember



Brandon T. Todd, Councilmember



Anita Bonds, Councilmember



Mary Cheh, Councilmember



Yvette M. Alexander, Councilmember



Keryon R. McDuffie, Councilmember

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