



COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
THE JOHN A. WILSON BUILDING
1350 PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE, N.W.
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20004

October 8, 2015

The Honorable Jason Chaffetz
Chairperson, Committee on Oversight & Government Reform
United States House of Representatives
2236 Rayburn Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Chairperson Chaffetz:

We write as locally elected officials to express our opposition to renewed efforts to expand a federally funded school voucher program in the District of Columbia. We appreciate your interest in providing support to public education in the District. We strongly believe, however, that federal funds should be invested in the existing public education system – both public schools and public charter schools – rather than being diverted to private schools.

We support the decision by Congress and the President several years ago to phase out the voucher program. Multiple U.S. Department of Education reports indicate that the program has not lived up to the promises made by proponents. These studies along with two troubling Government Accountability Office reports have also revealed that many of the students participating in the voucher program attend private schools with fewer resources and lower standards than our public schools. The evidence is clear that the use of vouchers has had no statistically significant impact on overall student achievement in math or reading, or for students from schools in need of improvement.

We have serious concerns about using government funds to send our students to private schools that do not have to adhere to the same standards and accountability as do public and public charter schools. For example, private religious schools, which 80% of students with vouchers attend, operate outside the non-discrimination provisions of the D.C. Human Rights Act. Moreover, the voucher proposal is inequitable: if fully funded, the authorization would provide many more dollars per student for vouchers than is allocated per student in public schools and public charter schools.

Although we believe that students who are already receiving a voucher should have the opportunity to maintain and use that voucher through graduation from high school, we do not support expansion of the program to new students. The District devotes considerable funds to public education, and our local policies promote choice for parents. Indeed, over the past decade the quality of public education in D.C. has increased, as a result of reforms and targeted



investment. Families can choose from an array of educational institutions based on publicly available performance metrics, both within the D.C. Public Schools system and among the myriad public charter schools. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan has called the progress of D.C. Public Schools “remarkable”, while the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools has ranked the District’s charter sector as the best in the country.

Despite such ample evidence that the Congressionally imposed voucher program is ineffective, while D.C. public schools improve every year, some members of Congress continue to see our city as their personal petri dish. It is insulting to our constituents, who vote for us but not for any voting member of Congress, that some of your colleagues push their personal agendas on D.C. in a way they could never do in their home states. Attacking D.C. home rule, including any expansion of the voucher program, is irresponsible governing on the part of Congress.

We call on you to respect the wishes of the District’s elected officials on the quintessentially local matter of education as you consider this issue.

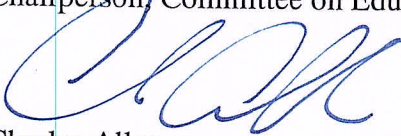
Sincerely,



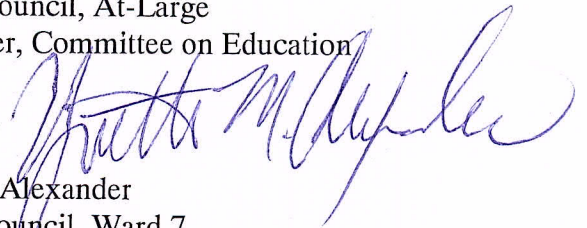
David Grosso
D.C. Council, At-Large
Chairperson, Committee on Education



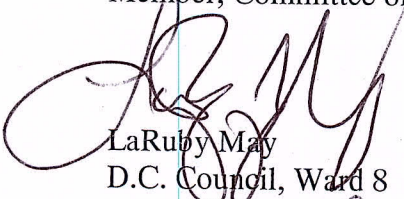
Anita Bonds
D.C. Council, At-Large
Member, Committee on Education



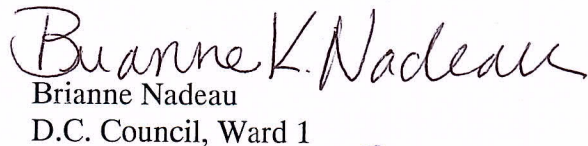
Charles Allen
D.C. Council, Ward 6
Member, Committee on Education



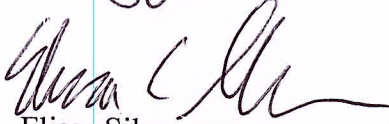
Yvette Alexander
D.C. Council, Ward 7
Member, Committee on Education



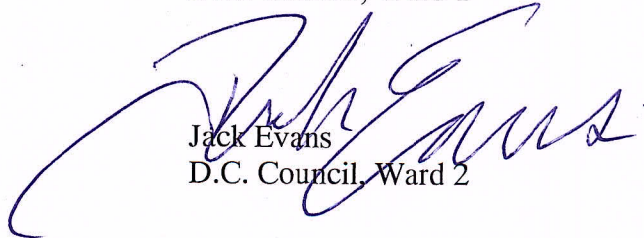
LaRuby May
D.C. Council, Ward 8



Brianne Nadeau
D.C. Council, Ward 1



Elissa Silverman
D.C. Council, At-Large



Jack Evans
D.C. Council, Ward 2