

Letters of Support for H.R. 2556
*The D.C. Parental Choice
Incentive Act of 2003*

THE Center for Education Reform



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June 26, 2003

Celebrating 10 years of excellence!
Join us at our Anniversary Gala, October 29, Washington, DC

The Honorable Tom Davis
Chairman
Committee on Government Reform
US House of Representatives
2157 Rayburn HOB
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Davis:

On behalf of our group and its extensive national network of reformers, parents and civic leaders, I am writing to thank you for your support of the effort to bring more opportunities for parents to the District of Columbia.

For too long the District has been plagued by failing test scores, inertia, and inefficiencies beyond a parent's control. Efforts such as charter schools and higher standards have helped alleviate some of the issues for some children, but far too many are still trapped in schools that have not yet improved in delivering even a basic level of education.

While the District is only one city, it is a place to which all the rest of the education reform community turns for leadership. The DC Parental Choice Incentive Act of 2003 is the kind of effort that can galvanize parents around better schools and reformers in general around the urgent need to make all schools work better for all children.

We are delighted that we've been able to help move the issue of school choice along since it first began being pushed in Washington, DC in 1996. We commend the efforts of your committee and your colleagues to move this long-standing, important issue forward. Know that you have the support of parents and teachers in this endeavor and that the leadership you and the other committee members are demonstrating will be widely noticed and remembered.

Best Regards,

Jeanne Allen
President



Christian Coalition of America

July 7, 2003

The Honorable Tom Davis
Chairman
Committee on Government Reform
US House of Representatives
2157 Rayburn HOB
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Davis,

Thank you for introducing H.R. 2556, the "District of Columbia Parental Choice Incentive Act of 2003." With a failing school system, our Nation's Capital is ranked as one of the worst school systems in the country. As Chairman Boehner said in reference to H.R. 2556, "We are throwing a lifeline to children who need immediate new options, and breathing new life into an old system that desperately needs to improve."

In the most recent mathematics assessment 76 percent of DC fourth-graders scored at the 'below basic' level and in a recent reading assessment 72 percent of fourth graders scored at the 'below basic' level. The children of DC are not failing the system; the system is failing the children. We need real change and H.R. 2556 is real change. We need to offer children more options than a failing school system. We need to offer the children of DC a chance for a quality education.

The "District of Columbia Parental Choice Incentive Act of 2003" would provide low-income parents who live in D.C. an opportunity to enroll their children in higher performing private schools in the District. A student could receive a scholarship up to \$7,500 to cover tuition, fees and transportation for a private elementary or high school. Research has shown that competition provided by school choice benefits both the private and public schools, by creating an atmosphere of high expectations and a climate of education achievement.

Christian Coalition of America supports H.R. 2556, the "District of Columbia Parental Choice Incentive Act of 2003." Thank you for offering the Children of our Nation's Capital a chance for a quality education.

Sincerely,

Roberta Combs
President
Christian Coalition of America



July 8, 2003

Tom Davis
Chairman
Committee on Government Reform
U.S. House of Representatives
2157 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Davis:

On behalf of the 280,000 members of Citizens for a Sound Economy (CSE), I would like to thank you and the other Members of the House Committee on Government Reform for considering H.R. 2556, the District of Columbia Parental Choice Incentive Act of 2003.

We all realize that simply giving more money to a broken public education monopoly is not the answer. In fact, Washington, D.C. already spends \$9,650 per pupil a year, which is more than \$3,000 above the national average. If spending were the issue, D.C. would have a top-notch education system, yet 76 percent of the District's fourth graders scored at a "below basic" level.

We can no longer accept this failure. H.R. 2556 will provide at least \$15 million in scholarships to low-income children in the District to help them attend the private school of their choice. More importantly, these scholarships are administered outside of the existing public school monopoly, and will be controlled the by the student and his or her parents.

Properly structured, we expect H.R. 2556 to unleash forces of innovation and competition to the benefit of all D.C. schoolchildren. CSE supports this legislation because it will, for the first time, bring real choice and real change to the moribund D.C. public school system.

School choice through individual scholarships will bring competition and will put students first. If we can make this work in D.C., it will be a model for states and localities to introduce real school choice in every school district in America.

Sincerely,

Paul Beckner
President
Citizens for a Sound Economy

cc: House Leadership

D.C. PARENTS
FOR SCHOOL
CHOICE, INC.

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20011

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Email: gwalden@pcsi.com

June 25, 2003

The Honorable Tom Davis
Chairman
Committee on Government Reform
US House of Representatives
2157 Rayburn HOB
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Davis:

We appreciate your commitment to making sure our children have a chance. We, parents of the District of Columbia, applaud you, Congressman Boehner and many others who have stood up and spoken out on behalf of our children.

We don't want to destroy the public schools, but we can't sit by while they destroy our children. The longer children stay in DCPS, the further many of them fall behind. We've waited so very long for our children to be educated in quality and safe educational environments. We can't wait any longer. So many of our children are struggling and their future is bleak. We just want to give our children what every parent wants for their children...a bright and successful future.

We stand in support of HR 2556, the DC Parental Choice Incentive Act of 2003 and we thank you and your colleagues for making this possible. We are so happy that our children will have a better chance to obtain the tools they need to go forward toward educational excellence.

Sincerely,

Virginia Walden-Ford

Virginia Walden Ford
D.C. Parents for School Choice

Give parents a choice, give children a chance.



Education Leaders Council

July 7, 2003

The Honorable Tom Davis
Chairman
Committee on Government Reform
US House of Representatives
2157 Rayburn HOB
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Davis:

Education Leaders Council is pleased to support H.R. 2556, the District of Columbia Parental Choice Incentive Act, and we applaud the leadership shown by you and your committee in moving this bill so quickly. We urge the committee to approve this groundbreaking legislation and bring it to the full House for consideration as soon as possible.

At ELC, we believe all families have a fundamental right to choose their child's school, regardless of income bracket, race, or geography. We also believe choice can come in all sorts of forms, from charters and supplemental services – both of which are provided by NCLB – to more creative approaches such as open enrollment and tuition tax credits. In fact, H.R. 2556 uses a structure remarkably similar to that adopted by the tuition tax credit and other scholarship-based programs adopted in Arizona, Pennsylvania, and elsewhere -- and which were recently determined to be constitutional under the *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris* decision. This is largely because the scholarships provided by H.R. 2556 are provided not to specific schools, but to individuals, who may then exercise free choice – a system that has worked well for our higher education system for nearly six decades.

At heart of this discussion lies a basic philosophical question: How bad does a system have to get before we finally allow families an option of escaping from a failed system? Schools in the district haven't gotten any better simply because they've never needed to – they almost literally have a captive audience of children and families who are trapped in failing schools not only because they haven't traditionally been allowed to exercise any choice, but also because the choices they are now allowed under NCLB are only for other public schools within the District, nearly all of which are failing. Enough is enough.

Families in the District deserve better. A zip code shouldn't consign a family to educational oblivion. These families deserve the fair chance for success and a fair chance

EDUCATION LEADERS COUNCIL

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The Honorable Tom Davis
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to exercise the fundamental right to choose a school that meets their educational needs.
H.R. 2556 will finally provide District families with a real say in their child's education.

We appreciate your leadership on this critical legislation, and look forward to its passage
by the committee and approval in the House.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lisa Graham Keegan". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Lisa Graham Keegan
Chief Executive Officer

cc: Chairman John Boehner

EDUCATION LEADERS COUNCIL

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June 26, 2003

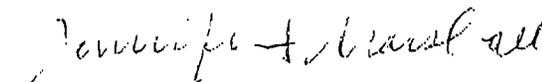
The Honorable Tom Davis
Chairman, Committee on Government Reform
U.S. House of Representatives
2157 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Davis,

Empower America is pleased to support the introduction of the D.C. Parental Choice Incentive Act of 2003 (H.R. 2556). Children in the District have for too long been denied the opportunity to succeed because of a lack of quality educational options. Your legislation will bring new hope to thousands of families in the city.

We commend you and Chairman Boehner for your leadership, and we look forward to working with you toward the passage of this important legislation. Its enactment will represent the achievement of a goal sought for the past decade by residents and friends of Washington, D.C.

Sincerely,


Jennifer A. Marshall
Government Relations Liaison



INSTITUTE FOR JUSTICE

June 25, 2003

The Honorable Tom Davis
Chairman
Committee on Government Reform
US House of Representatives
2157 Rayburn HOB
Washington, DC 20515

VIA FACSIMILE

Representative Davis:

We are writing to express our support for H.R. 2556, the District of Columbia Parental Choice Incentive Act of 2003.

We believe there is no school system in the country that more desperately needs school choice than our nation's capital. Nearly 50 years after *Brown v. Board of Education*, we are poised to take a giant step in making the promise of equal educational opportunities a reality.

As you know, the Institute for Justice has helped successfully defend Cleveland's school choice program before the U.S. Supreme Court on behalf of parents. The Institute also successfully defended vouchers in Milwaukee and tax credits in Illinois and Arizona. IJ is currently defending Florida's groundbreaking Opportunity Scholarships program, Colorado's Opportunity Contract program—the nation's first new choice program since the Supreme Court victory—and is fighting state-level barriers to choice in Maine and Vermont.

We have seen in all these places that school choice acts as a life preserver for children in failing schools, and it encourages public schools to adopt long overdue reforms. The District of Columbia will be no exception.

The Institute for Justice will continue to defend school choice programs across the country, and we commend you for your leadership on this issue.

Sincerely,

William Mellor
President and General Counsel

Clint Bolick
Vice President and National
Director of State Chapters



June 25, 2003

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The Honorable Tom Davis
Chairman
Committee on Government Reform
US House of Representatives
2157 Rayburn HOB
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Davis:

Congratulations on your excellent proposal to bring school vouchers to the District of Columbia. The Lexington Institute is proud to support your efforts, and will be glad to be of any assistance to you or your staff in making it a reality. The *Washington Post* earlier this year accurately described, "the failure of some [Washington, D.C.] public schools to offer even the semblance of an education." The high demand for private and parochial educations is a well-documented fact of life in this community. Shouldn't poor families be able to avail themselves of these same options for their children, as your plan would achieve?

As for myself, I have lived in the District for 13 years, and been an active supporter of school choice for most of that time. I have also done a good deal of work with at-risk children in Washington, DC, many from the poorest neighborhoods that would be most helped by your plan. If you or any of your colleagues ever have any doubt that you are doing the right thing on this critical issue, please let me know and I would gladly escort you on a visit to one or more of the public schools these children currently attend. What you are doing is not only historic, it is heroic.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "D. Soifer", is written over the typed name.

Don Soifer
Executive Vice President



800 Eighth Street, N.W. Suite 318 Washington, DC 20001 Tel: 202-513-6484 Fax: 202-289-8936

**UNION OF ORTHODOX JEWISH
CONGREGATIONS OF AMERICA**

Institute for Public Affairs June 25, 2003

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in 1898.*

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INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS

The Honorable Tom Davis
Chairman
Committee on Government Reform
US House of Representatives
2157 Rayburn HOB
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Davis:

We write to you today on behalf of the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America—the nation's largest Orthodox Jewish umbrella organization representing nearly 1,000 congregations nationwide—to express our support for the DC Parental Choice Incentive Act of 2003 (H.R. 2556) which is currently under consideration in the Committee on Government Reform.

The Orthodox Jewish community is proud to join with congressional leaders in this effort to provide hope and opportunity for the children of our nation's capitol. Children in inner cities across the United States are trapped in dysfunctional schools; for this to be the case in our nation's capitol – where they sit in the shadows of Jefferson and Lincoln and the words these leaders spoke, etched in stone, about the promise of equality and opportunity in our nation – is more than tragic. The Jewish people have long been called “the people of the book.” And as much as this description relates to our commitment to the teachings of the Bible, it also relates to our commitment to the power of teaching...and learning. We in the Orthodox Jewish community are committed to working with congressional leaders, and all Americans who care about our nation's children, to give all our children the opportunity to attend a school that meets their needs, that teaches them successfully and that gives them a real chance at the American dream.

We commend you for your leadership on this issue and offer our support and assistance in your efforts to bring equity and choice for the parents and children of the District of Columbia.

Sincerely,

Rabbi Tzvi Hirsch Weinreb
Executive Vice President

Nathan J. Diament
Director, IPA