

## **“Maintaining a Level Playing Field for D.C. Graduates: Legislation to Reauthorize the D.C. College Access Act”**

Opening Statement of Chairman Davis  
Committee on Government Reform  
March 25, 2003, 10:00 a.m.  
Room 2154 Rayburn House Office Building

Good morning. I would like to welcome everyone to today’s hearing to discuss the reauthorization of the District of Columbia Tuition Assistance Grant Program. The purpose of the hearing is to highlight the tremendous impact the Tuition Assistance Program has had on promoting higher education for high school graduates in the Nation’s Capital.

The original aim of the Program in 1999 was to provide D.C. high school graduates the same opportunity that college bound seniors in each of the 50 states have, specifically a network of state-supported institutions to attend at relatively low cost. The Program sought to level the playing field for D.C. residents, who do not have access to a similar state-supported system.

To accomplish this, the Tuition Assistance Grant Program covers the difference between in-State and out-of-State tuition rates for District high school graduates at public colleges and universities throughout the nation. The Program also provides limited financial assistance to D.C. high school graduates attending private schools in the D.C. metropolitan area, as well as students who attend private Historically Black Colleges and Universities in other states.

Given that the original five-year authorization for the Program expires after next year, Congresswoman Norton and I introduced H.R. 4012 on Tuesday to reauthorize the D.C. College Access Act. After all, the need for the Program that existed in 1999 continues to exist today.

The impact of the Grant Program on the Capital City is undeniable. Data from the Department of Education’s “Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System” show that the number of D.C. high school graduates continuing on to college increased from 1,750 in 1998 to 2,230 in 2002 – that’s a 28% increase since the Program was created. Compare that to the national average, over the same period, of a 5 percent increase. Granted, there are a number of factors that help to explain this rise, but a person would be hard pressed to deny the role of the D.C. Tuition Assistance Program. According to a survey conducted by the program, the vast majority of students who have received assistance through the program have indicated that the existence of the grants made a difference in their decision to attend college, and were a key factor in deciding which college to attend.

Operating hand-in-hand with the publicly funded D.C. Tuition Assistance Program is the D.C. College Access Program, an endeavor created and funded by the private sector to promote higher education in the District by offering last dollar financial

assistance and college counseling to D.C. high school students. The “double punch” provided by the Mayor’s D.C. Tuition Assistance Program and the private sector’s D.C. College Access Program is clearly having a tremendous impact on the educational opportunities available to D.C. high school students, and it is equally clear that students are becoming more aware of and choosing to take advantage of these opportunities.

As the Committee moves forward with consideration of H.R. 4012, I look forward to hearing from the witnesses their firsthand accounts of how this program has improved the quality of education in the Nation’s Capital, and what should be done to improve the Program in the future. I would especially like to welcome Mayor Williams here this morning. He was instrumental in the original passage of the legislation and has been committed to the success of the Program from the beginning.

Leveling the playing field for high school graduates in the District of Columbia continues to be a top priority for me as Chairman of the Committee that has oversight responsibility for the District of Columbia. After all, I represent a neighboring jurisdiction and I have always believed that you cannot have a healthy region without a healthy city. I welcome the witnesses here today to discuss this important issue.