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Government  
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Thank you, Senator Durbin and members of the subcommittee for the opportunity to speak on behalf of the Archdiocese of Washington in support of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program and on behalf of the nonpublic educational sector in support of continuing the legislation that supports the three-sector initiative as approved by Congress five years ago. The Opportunity Scholarship Program has afforded over 1,700 children each year the right to choose to change the course of their futures. I am proud to confirm that the Archdiocese of Washington has supported this program by providing seats for approximately 900 to 1,000 students each year, in the academically rich, welcoming and safe environments provided by our schools.

**A History of Excellent Schools**

As you know, Catholic education has a well-deserved national reputation of excellence and service spanning nearly 300 years. Many of you, your colleagues in Congress, and some of our country's most outstanding leaders are products of Catholic education, including Senator Durbin, Senator Landrieu, the late Senator Kennedy, as well as Speaker of the House Pelosi, Congressman Boehner and so many others. You are all evidence of the call to service and commitment to others that Catholic education has provided to this country. In fact, who among us has not been touched by someone who was educated in a Catholic school and has made a difference in our lives? Quite simply the graduates of Catholic schools live out the social justice mission of serving others as they become contributing members of society.

Catholic education has a rich history in our nation's capital, where the first Catholics arrived in this region in 1634, and by the late 1700s, the first Catholic schools were flourishing and had established the foundation for education in what is now the District of Columbia.

Since those early days, there has been a deep commitment by the Catholic Church to ensure all children have access to a quality education. In 1799, the Sisters of the Visitation at Georgetown Visitation offered a weekly Saturday school to any girl who wanted to learn, including slaves, even though it was illegal at the time to teach a slave to read. Today this school serves Opportunity Scholarship students. In 1813, Father William Matthews, the pastor of St. Patrick's, not only supported Catholic education, but also joined the board of trustees for the fledgling DC public schools. For 31 years, he worked tirelessly to raise money and establish a public school system. Fr. Matthews recognized that we all share in the responsibility of educating children and part of that responsibility is to not inhibit or preclude options.

In 1858, St. Augustine School was established to serve the black community, four years before public education became mandatory for black children in our nation's capital. In 1949, five years before the landmark Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* ended desegregation in public schools, Archbishop Patrick O'Boyle integrated the Catholic schools in our nation's capital. In 1951, Archbishop O'Boyle opened Archbishop Carroll High School – the first integrated high school in the city to open as an integrated school and the high school that has served Opportunity Scholarship students since the program was initiated. Today, 21 Catholic schools continue this legacy of faith, hope and learning for thousands of children throughout our capital city.

Today, on behalf of our school families I come to ask for your support for the Opportunity Scholarship Program so that the Archdiocese of Washington and other nonpublic schools may continue to serve those

families most in need in the District of Columbia. We are proud to be part of this innovative three-sector initiative to improve education for every child in the District of Columbia and we ask you, as stewards of the nation's capital, to recognize that the home of the U.S. Congress is only as strong and vibrant as the educational choices provided for all its citizens. No government should allow the right to choose a quality education to be cut short by the limits of personal income. In fact, just the other night in his remarks to the joint session of Congress, President Barack Obama stressed that we the citizens of this country "do better when there is choice and competition." The archdiocese's commitment to the Opportunity Scholarship Program is about providing the opportunities for all families in the District of Columbia to exercise their right to choose the best education for their children.

### **Program History - An Overview of Hope**

When the Opportunity Scholarship Program was proposed five years ago, the Archdiocese of Washington committed up to 1,000 seats for the low-income families the program would serve. We did this out of concern that enough seats might not be available once the program was approved. We opened our doors, welcomed the children, adjusted our staffing, increased our financial support for those schools and have successfully educated these children. As the program administration took shape, the schools adjusted to the federal regulations and reports, and the children and families worked to adapt to new surroundings and higher expectations. After four years the program is working and the students have proven themselves capable, committed, enthusiastic and grateful for the new-found hope for a brighter future. As one recently put it, "The DC Opportunity Scholarship Program has changed my life and has made me the successful young man standing before you now. I credit this program greatly for my success." (Ronald Holassie, Archbishop Carroll High School student, June 2009)

The best measure of success for our high schools is graduation and the percentage of graduates who are accepted to colleges and universities. At Archbishop Carroll High School, over 98% of all seniors are accepted to college. Only 48% of D.C. public high school students even graduate. Since 2007, 38 out of the 39 OSP students who have graduated from Archbishop Carroll have been accepted by multiple college and universities.

The individual stories of success are many. In 2008, Opportunity Scholar Tiffany Dunston was the class valedictorian. She is now a sophomore at the University of Syracuse. Current Opportunity Scholar Ronald Holassie serves as the deputy youth mayor for the District of Columbia. Others are excelling in debate, drama, music, athletics and academic programs that rest on the shoulders of a very dedicated and highly qualified faculty. It is our hope and expectation that these success stories will continue, so long as Congress lets them.

This past year 879 OSP students were enrolled in Catholic schools: of these students, 94% were African American and 80% were non-Catholic. After three years, research shows that "the OSP had a positive impact overall on parent's reports of school satisfaction and safety." (IES Report, April 2009). Our parents recognize the significant changes in their children's personal and academic growth as they flourish in new communities where no distinctions are made regarding one's scholarship status. During this short time we have witnessed eighth grade scholarship students graduate yearly and move to their high school of choice, with most continuing in Catholic high schools.

All 21 Catholic schools in the District of Columbia participated in the Opportunity Scholarship Program this past year, except for the Joseph P. Kennedy Institute, which is an ungraded school serving persons with disabilities and operated by Catholic Charities. All full-time teachers hired to work in Catholic schools possess Bachelor's degrees or the international equivalent and many more have earned Master's degrees as well as the PhDs and the EdDs. We are extremely proud of our faculty and their commitment to the vocation of teaching in Catholic schools.

All Catholic school buildings have certificates of occupancy, and all provide safe, secure and welcoming learning environments.

### **Opportunity Scholarships, Tuition and Cost**

This program was initiated with the requirement that the scholarship would pay only for tuition and fees. Yet, in reality, tuition at participating parish-based Catholic schools does not cover the cost of educating a child. Therefore, at the outset and as the program grew, the archdiocese and all nonpublic schools have had to face the issue of increasing costs. The Archdiocese of Washington and parishes supporting schools have had to subsidize the difference between scholarship revenue and cost. On the average, the Catholic Church of Washington has contributed about \$3,000 for each OSP student in an archdiocesan-supported elementary school. The deficit is greater at the high school level, where it costs \$13,000 per student to be educated at Archbishop Carroll High School, yet the scholarship's amount has remained at \$7,500.

The archdiocese has chosen to support the Opportunity Scholarship students, just as the church has chosen to support all students who attend our schools. We do this through the generosity and commitment of donors, parishioners and the wider community in the Archdiocese of Washington. This is the legacy of Catholic schools in the District of Columbia.

This is about the opportunity for low income families (average income under \$24,000) to exercise their right to choose a quality education for their children. It is not about money – the money does not go to the schools or parishes or archdiocese. The check is made out to the families and allows them the dignity to decide where their children will go to school and then with this scholarship, to pay for their children's education just as more fortunate families pay for their children.

Yet the reality must be addressed. Without Congressional support, there is little chance that the large number of students who are now dependent upon these scholarships will be able to continue in these schools past June 2010, the end date of the program. Losing these scholarships will profoundly harm these children by forcing them from their schools; create abrupt enrollment loss in several participating schools, thereby de-stabilizing the schools for the future; and have an immediate and significant financial impact on the District of Columbia.

Grandfathering the current students is not enough. With the loss of OSP students currently in the eighth grade or seniors in high schools, schools will experience significant decreases in enrollments and tuition revenues as there will be no new OSP students. The archdiocese and the schools do not have the funds to provide scholarships for the many poor students who would have replaced the graduating students if the program continued.

Without the new legislation, 86% of these OSP students will have to return to schools that have failed to make adequate yearly progress as measured by No Child Left Behind. Research has indicated that a return to these environments will set these children back academically at least a year and surely undo the significant gains achieved to date. Moreover, as the program ends and large numbers of OSP students transfer out of their schools, these schools will be endangered and may have to close as enrollments decrease and tuition to cover student costs disappears. As 1,700 displaced OSP students crowd public schools city-wide, this exodus will cost \$25 million plus \$54 million in lost funds allocated annually to the three sectors – a total cost of \$79 million. With a projected \$800 million dollar shortfall predicted for next year, it is unlikely the District of Columbia will be able to meet the need.

### **Academic Growth and Achievement**

After three years of study, Patrick Wolf, the lead researcher for the U.S. Department of Education's outcomes analysis, recently reported that "the DC voucher program has proven to be the most effective education policy evaluated by the federal government's official education research arm so far." (Wolf,

Hoover Institute) Based on the trends within the data, he expects the positive gains in scores to continue to increase. The study has not yet been completed.

The major study for the Department of Education by the Institute for Education Sciences found that after three years students offered scholarships and those using their scholarships had significantly higher levels of reading achievement than students not offered scholarships. (“The Evaluation of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program: Impacts After Three Years,” presented by the Institute of Education Sciences for the Department of Education, March 2009). Students who have been in the program the longest have the most improvement and are reading at a level of 1.5 years ahead of those not offered scholarships. The study also found, consistent with the previous first and second year studies, that the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program had a positive impact on parents’ perceptions of school safety and on parental satisfaction.

Although criticism continues regarding the lack of statistically significant gains in the math scores, Dr. Wolf and others have noted that OSP students’ math scores are in fact improving and that these improvements are not happening by chance alone. Further experts from Harvard suggest that “private schools boost reading scores more than math scores for a number of reasons, including greater content emphasis on reading, the use of phonics...” (Hoover Institute, August 2009). It is my opinion, based on my experience in our schools, and as witness to conscious instructional decisions, that no child can achieve significant gains in math unless he or she can read. The students coming into this program arrived reading below grade level and the focus of all interventions has been on reading and language skills. It is the goal of our inner city schools that all students read at grade level by grade three. In fact, ACT has noted that if children are literate at grade eight they will succeed in high school and beyond. Literacy is one of the most important measures of future success. (ACT press release, *Preparation by Eighth Grade Critical to College and Career Readiness*, December 10, 2008)

Academic success is a hallmark of Catholic education and is continuously reviewed in all Catholic schools by multiple measures of assessment. These outcome measures are shared with parents and used by teachers to improve instruction and achievement. All parents receive reports and participate in discussions regarding assessment results and next steps to support the students.

All archdiocesan elementary schools annually measure academic growth and achievement for all students. The Terra Nova is the standardized assessment used by the archdiocese to measure concepts, processes and objectives derived from national standards. The test was normed from a national cross section of more than 300,000 students in both 2000 and 2007 and the Terra Nova is standardized with a random sample based on geographic region, school size, socioeconomic status and ethnicity within public, parochial and private schools. (CTB/McGraw Hill, 2009) Analysis of these results focuses only on our student data, employing internal peer student comparisons and working to align test results with archdiocesan academic standards.

In keeping with the archdiocesan commitment to measuring academic success and creating a culture of academic accountability, the Archdiocese of Washington will employ a hierarchical linear growth model for analysis beginning this academic year. This approach allows all schools to track student progress based on established growth targets. The target scores are composite scores based on national norms, grade levels and local characteristics. Allowing for continuous instructional improvement, this state-of-the-art model provides the most accurate data necessary for the archdiocese to measure student progress over a span of time and in the context of each individual student’s performance. These measures will be used to analyze test results for all students, including the OSP students.

The Archdiocese of Washington fully supports accountability in education and unequivocally supports the need to monitor and report student outcomes with the Opportunity Scholarship Program. This would

mean including additional testing to ensure that OSP students are not only receiving a quality education but that taxpayer money is being spent wisely and appropriately. However, we cannot support these measures without openly discussing the reasons why we are currently unable to do this and our concerns regarding the potential burden placed on students and schools to meet these requirements. These concerns are not meant to preclude our participation, rather to inform and help develop the best process to measure and monitor student achievement.

While the Catholic schools have undertaken many steps to assure accountability, we do not participate in a uniform common exam, simply because the cost is prohibitive and federal guidelines exclude Catholic schools from using federal funds to support development of accountability measures. As such, funding for resources to pay for common exams will be necessary in new legislation. The archdiocese welcomes the opportunity to compare our results with other populations. In fact, the Catholic Schools Office for the archdiocese has been actively seeking ways to compare all students, not just OSP students, to students in their local jurisdictions. Currently we are waiting for a proposal from CTB/McGraw Hill (author of the Terra Nova) on building a conversion scale that would allow our students' Terra Nova scores to be statistically equated to the DC-CAS and the State of Maryland assessment, the MSA. (Both state-based assessments are designed by CTB/McGraw Hill and normed to state standards particular to DC and Maryland.)

In addition to the Terra Nova, all archdiocesan OSP students currently take the Stanford Achievement Test - Version 9 (SAT-9). This data is used for the academic achievement research and analysis conducted by the Department of Education's Institute of Educational Sciences. This was the test of choice for the District of Columbia schools at the start of the Opportunity Scholarship Program. This is a nationally normed test and the data has been used to compare the treatment and control groups and has required all OSP students and control group students in DC public schools to take a second standardized test each year.

As the Opportunity Scholarship Program moves forward, the archdiocese recognizes the need to participate in the continued research protocols designed to assess learning outcomes. I have spoken with Chancellor Michelle Rhee, and agree with her regarding the need for both of us to be consulted by the research provider as the design and delivery of all research protocols are developed. I support an assessment of the academic value added by participating schools on a school-by-school basis based on the appropriate testing of participating eligible students using an agreed upon assessment protocol for both the nonpublic and public schools. These assessments would be based on the strongest possible research design and would, to the extent possible, test students under conditions that yield scientifically valid results. This suggests that OSP students' test scores be compared to the scores of DCPS students who attend the school that the OSP students would have attended based on his or her home address.

Our concerns with administering the DC-CAS to our OSP students are two-fold. First, if the DC-CAS is the test of choice, all analysis must control for the reality that the DC-CAS is aligned to District of Columbia Public School standards; standards not shared by the archdiocese. Our curriculum is aligned to the archdiocesan standards. DC-OSP students would need to be provided the same preparation materials, coaching and time as the DCPS students. Second, administering the DC-CAS to our OSP students would place a potential burden on them in relation to their classroom work time, with a potential of almost twenty days of testing. We will need to examine how to monitor testing and ensure the best use of taxpayer dollars and student time.

Our Catholic schools will participate in the research required by new legislation and understand the importance of comparing OSP students to those in schools they are not attending. We agree that we must ensure that the program is successful as defined by ensuring a safe school environment, parent and student satisfaction and the ability to provide an education that allows students to consistently be prepared

for high school and beyond. We look forward to the passage of the SOAR (Scholarship for Opportunity and Results) legislation and the opportunity to work with Chancellor Rhee and the Department of Education to design the scientific model that best meets the research needs of the public, and yet supports the education of all children in the District of Columbia.

Finally, as we look at the achievements measured by the Department of Education and the lead researcher's comments, we must note that Dr. Wolf has referenced the fact that when a student transfers from one school to another, it takes at least a year for the child to adjust to his or her new surroundings. During that time, it is anticipated that the child's test scores will drop. If the program does not continue, close to 1,700 students will be set back after four to five years of verifiable growth measured by standardized testing.

### **Citizens of the District of Columbia Support this Program**

Over 8,000 DC families have applied for scholarships since the program began in 2004, with 3,000 children served. In July 2009, a survey of 1,001 registered DC voters demonstrated that more than 80 percent of District parents of school-aged children support the program. These families know that the Chancellor and Mayor are working to improve the public schools but they also know, as Michelle Rhee has noted, that "despite the progress of the last two years, the situation remains dire when less than half of our students can read, write and do math at grade level." (Washington Post, July 24, 2009) It is very difficult for families to transfer to schools that are successful and many lose out on the lotteries for seats at public charter schools or successful public schools (i.e. Janey Elementary). The Chancellor also acknowledged that although vouchers won't solve all problems, they are an important part of the "choice dynamic" and at this time the voucher program "continues to make sense." (Washington Post, July 24, 2009)

The DC Council agrees with the Chancellor and the several thousand families that rallied in front of the Wilson Building in support of this popular program. On June 22, 2009, the majority of Council members of the District of Columbia sent a letter to U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan and Mayor Fenty expressing support for the continuation of the Opportunity Scholarship Program. After citing the success of the program, the seven council members stated: "We believe we simply cannot turn our backs on these families because doing so will deny their children the quality education they deserve."

It is time for the Congress to accept the facts and recognize that failure to support Opportunity Scholarships would put the future on hold for the children and families of the District of Columbia. Passing this legislation now will only cost a few million dollars compared to the billions spent on welfare and stimulus packages. Investing now will make a difference.

The statistics are indisputable. While the per-student cost in the DC public schools is the third highest in the United States, test scores continue to be among the lowest in the nation. Ninety of 123 public schools are under some form of federal notice to improve while the majority of the District's teenage public school students attend schools that meet the District's own definition of "persistently dangerous" due to the number of violent crimes. Today many of these schools hinder opportunity and do not ensure access to competitive education in the future. The Chancellor is to be commended for the leadership and vision she has brought to the public schools. It is our sincere hope that she will continue to be empowered to bring about the much needed changes and continued improvement in all public schools. We support her work and the work of the charter schools. Together we all provide options for our families and the Chancellor must be given the time and support necessary to improve these schools for all children. Until that time, we need the Opportunity Scholarships and the funding provided for both the public schools and the charter schools as outlined in the legislation.

In an address to Congress, President Barack Obama noted, “good education is no longer just a pathway to opportunity – it is a prerequisite ... to ensure that every child has access to a complete and competitive education – from the day they are born to the day they begin a career.” The Opportunity Scholarship Program is providing “a pathway to opportunity” and the right to choose a good school for the poor children in the nation’s capital. And just as our country has historically provided federal funding for students to attend Catholic colleges and universities, with such programs as the Pell Grants, the National Defense Education Act, the GI Bill and the TAG program here in the District of Columbia, we also should make the same opportunities possible for students in elementary and high school.

Neither public nor charter nor Catholic schools can educate everyone effectively. Each student is unique and has unique learning needs. Catholic schools exist for the purpose of meeting specific needs and expectations as described in our teaching mission statements, just as public schools exist to meet the unique needs and expectations for an educated and informed public. Without programs like the Opportunity Scholarship Program, we endanger both missions, and the potential for families to choose a public, charter or nonpublic school. As the current administration works to improve education in the District of Columbia, the added expense of a sudden influx of over 1,000 students will become an unnecessary burden, while Catholic and nonpublic schools will become the exclusive right and privilege of the wealthy. This leaves the future generation of DC residents weakened and denies the opportunity for access to success to both those students who need and deserve a great public, charter or Catholic (nonpublic) school.

### **Conclusion**

The Archdiocese of Washington has a proud history demonstrating our commitment to serving the students in the District of Columbia. In 2004, this archdiocese stepped up in support of a new program, made seats available, and participated in extensive reviews and research. The program covers only tuition and fees, not the total cost per pupil. The archdiocese and the parishes have subsidized every Opportunity Scholarship student attending our schools. We do this because we are committed to making a difference in the lives of the children.

The research both internally and externally has demonstrated continued growth and mastery in reading, language arts and subsequently growth in math and other subjects. Parent reports testify to the overwhelming satisfaction of families and the significance of safe and secure environments, where each child is respected and honored. The students have lobbied, rallied and testified before the DC City Council and here in the halls of Congress. The students want to continue in this program. The DC City Council has written to the Secretary of Education asking for his support.

Our schools have complied with all regulations and look forward to continuing the research based on testing and comparative methodologies. The District of Columbia is not capable of absorbing these students, given the status of the schools and the enormous deficit the city faces. The funds requested to support this program are very little when compared to the billions of dollars in new federal grants recently released (July 24, 2009) by Secretary Duncan as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). These are funds that may make a difference in the future, but will go to adults, not to families – not to children. The cost of this program is a drop in the famous stimulus bucket and yet it is the program that works. President Obama noted that he expected Secretary Duncan to “use only one test when deciding what ideas to support with your precious tax dollars. It is not whether an idea is liberal or conservative, but whether it works.” This is the one successful program that logic and reason requires everyone to support.

On behalf of all Opportunity Scholarship students and the families in the District of Columbia, I strongly urge Congress to support the Opportunity Scholarship Program as a part of the three-sector initiative and described in the SOAR legislation proposed by Senator Lieberman. As noted in this testimony, we are

called by our commitment to social justice to recognize that the 8,000 families who have applied over the past four years are families whose right to choose a quality education for their children is limited by income, not by ability. Unlike the majority of Congress or the Secretary of Education and the President of this country, they do not have the means to choose the best neighborhoods with the best public schools, or the best private schools. For any child, but particularly for a child coming from a life of poverty, success depends on more than book learning. It comes when a child develops a deep sense of self worth, dignity, respect and self confidence. This is the dignity of choice through scholarships. This is the culture of hope that our schools provide for these children. Hope for the future. Hope for the District of Columbia. Hope for the country.

As Archbishop Donald W. Wuerl has written, “It is difficult to envision what political advantage would outweigh – in the scale of human lives – these young people, their future and their hope. In making political choices, the faces, futures and the hopes of these kids must come first.”

The children and their families need the Opportunity Scholarship Program. All who have been entrusted with the responsibility for the future of this program must vote to fully fund the legislation. The children are depending upon you.

Thank You.