



August 13, 2009

Dear Senator:

On behalf of the 100,000 bipartisan members of the American Association of University Women (AAUW), I **urge you to oppose and not cosponsor the Scholarships for Opportunity and Results Act (S. 1552), introduced by Sen. Joe Lieberman (I-CT)**. The bill would reauthorize the District of Columbia private school voucher pilot program, allow new students into the program, increase the number of students who receive vouchers, and increase the voucher amount. This program funnels taxpayer money to private schools that do not have to follow many civil rights laws, such as the No Child Left Behind Act and Title IX, which prohibits sex discrimination in educational programs that receive federal funding.

AAUW has long opposed diverting public funds to private or religious elementary and secondary schools. The District of Columbia Opportunity Scholarship Program was created in 2003 as a five-year pilot program, scheduled to expire in 2008. The program, which currently receives approximately \$14 million, provides vouchers of up to \$7,500 a piece to about 1,700 students. This program is the nation's only federally-funded voucher program. Although the program expired in 2008, it was funded by the FY2009 Appropriations Act for one additional year. The current version of FY2010 Financial Services and General Government Appropriations Act (S. 1432) is similar to the budget request proposed by President Obama. The bill includes \$12.2 million for the program, limits the program to those students who received scholarships in the 2009-2010 school year, and includes an additional \$1 million for new testing requirements. The bill also includes important provisions from the FY2009 Appropriations Act that require schools to have certificates of occupancy and ensure that core subject teachers have bachelor's degrees. AAUW has opposed continuation of the expired voucher program and we strongly oppose reauthorizing the program.

The DC voucher program has not been shown to improve academic achievement. In April 2009, the Department of Education released a new report which found no improvement in academic achievement for those students receiving vouchers from public schools in need of improvement – the target audience of the voucher program.¹ An earlier report from June 2008 found that “after 2 years, there was no statistically significant difference in test scores in general between students who were offered an OSP [Opportunity Scholarship Program] scholarship and students who were not offered a scholarship.” In addition, while “the Program had a positive impact on overall parent satisfaction and parent perceptions of school safety ... [s]tudents had a different view of their schools than did their parents.” Overall, student satisfaction was unaffected by the voucher program.²

In addition, a November 2007 GAO report revealed numerous problems with the District of Columbia voucher program, including a lack of detailed fiscal policies and not adhering to procedures for making scholarship payments. The report also found that many of the participating schools conducted classes in unsuitable learning environments taught by teachers lacking bachelor's degrees. In many cases, parents were not informed of these deficiencies.³

Again, AAUW strongly **urges you to oppose and not cosponsor the Scholarships for Opportunity and Results Act (S. 1552) as it would extend and expand the DC school voucher program**. Cosponsorship and votes associated with these issues may be included in the AAUW Action Fund

Congressional Voting Record for the 111th Congress. If you have any questions or need additional information, feel free to contact me at 202/785-7720, or Tracy Sherman, government relations manager, at 202/785-7730.

Sincerely,



Lisa M. Maatz
Director, Public Policy and Government Relations

¹ U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Statistics. (April 2009). *Evaluation of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program: Impact After Three Years*. Retrieved April 3, 2009, from <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/pubs/20094050/pdf/20094050.pdf>.

² U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Statistics. (June 2008). *Evaluation of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program: Impacts After Two Years Executive Summary*. Retrieved June 16, 2008, from <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/pdf/20084024.pdf>.

³ U.S. Government Accounting Office. (November 2007). *District of Columbia Opportunity Scholarship Program: Additional Politics and Procedures Would Improve Internal Controls and Program Operations*. GAO-08-9 Retrieved December 5, 2007, from <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d089.pdf>.