



March 9, 2009

United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator:

On behalf of the hundreds of thousands of members of People For the American Way, we urge you to oppose **Senator Ensign's proposed DC voucher amendment (615) to the omnibus appropriations bill (H.R. 1105)**. The experimental DC private school voucher program has failed to provide any significant improvement in the educational attainment of the enrolled students – the primary reason offered by proponents for its original passage. Furthermore, this program continues to undermine fundamental constitutional principles as well as the core accountability requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act. We implore you to focus scarce federal resources on programs that will create opportunity for all public school students and not just a select few.

As a civil rights organization dedicated to protecting core constitutional principles, People For the American Way opposes the DC private school voucher program because it is a blatant infringement upon the separation of church and state and fails to adequately protect the civil rights of all students. The DC private school voucher program federally funds and permits private institutions to discriminate against students and staff based upon religion, gender, and limited English proficiency. Notably, this program even allows private schools to discriminate against students by picking and choosing which students to educate; public schools on the other hand must educate every child. The end result is the undermining of the diversity upon which this country flourishes.

Claims that funding of the voucher program is necessary to ensure increased funding for the DC public school system is a ruse created by the previous Administration to move an ideological agenda. Throughout the tenure of the experimental DC private school voucher program, DC public and charter schools could have utilized the nearly \$70 million in funds allocated to the voucher program for critical school safety measures and repairs. Instead, this funding was used to support a program that has consistently been found to have “no significant impact on student achievement.” In fact, the most recent study by the US Department of Education once again revealed that there were no significant differences in reading or math between DC private school voucher students and students attending DC public schools.<sup>1</sup> This 2007 study even found that the program is not serving the intended target group - those students attending schools in need of improvement. This was the purported reason for the support of some Senators when the program was initially funded and failing on this point alone should be reason enough for the program's elimination. DC public school students deserve better.

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<sup>1</sup> “Evaluation of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program: Impacts After One Year,” Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, June 2007.

For the reasons outlined above, People For the American Way strongly recommends that you oppose **Senator Ensign's proposed DC voucher amendment (615) to the omnibus appropriations bill (H.R. 1105)** Federally funded voucher programs like the DC program would symbolize the government's de-prioritization of the public schools and therefore its students. President Obama has emphasized the need for transparency in government and the elimination of ineffective programs. The evidence is clear that the DC voucher program has **not** proven to be an effective educational tool. To the contrary, this program has actually hindered the improvement of our public educational system. We hope that you will stand with the President to support our public school students and oppose continued funding of this program.

Sincerely,



Kathryn Kolbert  
President



Tanya Clay House  
Director, Public Policy