



September 10, 2025

The Honorable James Comer  
Chairman, House Oversight  
and Government Reform Committee  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Virginia Foxx  
Chairman  
House Rules Committee  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Comer and Dr. Foxx:

The American Federation for Children, the largest school choice advocacy organization in the country, and the Defense of Freedom Institute Action, a national organization dedicated to advancing education freedom, are proud to support H.R. 5181, the SOAR Act Improvements Act. This bill will reauthorize and strengthen the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program (OSP). We are grateful to Dr. Foxx for sponsoring this important bill and to you Chairman Comer for moving it through Committee.

The DC OSP began in the 2004-2005 school year and, since then, more than 12,000 D.C. children from lower income families have received scholarships to attend the school best suited to their needs. The average family income for OSP participants is less than \$28,000 per year; 94 percent of students are African American or Hispanic; and 42 percent receive SNAP and/or TANF benefits.

In addition to serving students and families with the greatest financial and educational needs, the OSP is a proven success for students and extremely popular among parents. The most recent summary data shows that 93% of OSP 12<sup>th</sup> graders graduated high school; 89% were accepted to a two- or four-year college or university; and 5% went on to the military or a trade school. 97 percent of families expressed their satisfaction with the program.

The annual appropriation for the SOAR Act has been flat for seven years at \$52.5 million. This has resulted in just \$17.5 million for the OSP, which falls well short of meeting demand for the program. Also because of high inflation and mandatory increased scholarship amounts during the Biden years, many longtime scholarship recipients were forced out of the program. While the

OSP program administrator typically processes more than 3,000 applications annually, this year they will only be able to serve approximately 1325 students. This is down from nearly 1,900 students just three years ago.

This bill makes important and needed adjustments to the funding allocations by sector. The OSP is entirely dependent on the federal appropriation, whereas funds for DC charter schools and DC public schools are *in addition* to what they already receive for K-12 education. Funding since 2004-2005 has been unequal. DC public schools have received \$406 million; DC charter schools have received \$362 million; while the OSP has only received \$349 million.

The bill also includes a critically important update to the school accreditation list, which is an original public school list from nearly 20 years ago. This outdated list has depressed participation of existing private schools in the city and was a barrier preventing other high quality private school networks from coming to D.C.

The DC Opportunity Scholarship Program has been a lifeline for thousands of students from lower income families in Washington, D.C. It is an incredible success story and we urge members to pass this important bill.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "John Schilling". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

John Schilling  
Defense of Freedom Institute Action and American Federation for Children