



September 8, 2025

Chairman James Comer
U.S. House Committee on Oversight
2157 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Ranking Member Robert Garcia
U.S. House Committee on Oversight
109 Cannon House Office Building
Washington DC 20515

RE: Reauthorization of the D.C. Voucher Program

Dear Chairman Comer and Ranking Member Garcia:

The 40 undersigned members of the National Coalition for Public Education (NCPE) write to voice our opposition to the expansion, continued funding, and reauthorization of the District of Columbia private school voucher program as proposed in H.R. 5181. In particular, we staunchly oppose the egregious expansion of the D.C. voucher program proposed in this bill that would strip federal funds provided to District public schools under the SOAR Act, and funnel that money into the failing D.C. private school voucher program. The Committee should not fund—let alone expand—a voucher program that is ineffective, unaccountable to taxpayers, and poorly managed. And it should not send millions of dollars to voucher schools that do not provide the same civil rights protections afforded to students in the public schools, including for students with disabilities under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Federal taxpayer dollars should fund public schools that serve all students.

This SOAR Reauthorization Defunds D.C. Public Schools

Since 2003, Congress has provided equal amounts of money under the SOAR Act to three education systems in the District of Columbia: D.C. public schools, D.C. public charter schools, and D.C. private schools that participate in the voucher program. This “three-pronged approach” was critical to gaining support for the program from D.C. Mayor Anthony Williams¹ (although the additional funds still did not sway the majority of the District’s Council Members to support the program)² and was an essential component in attracting bipartisan support in Congress.³

¹ When Williams changed his position he noted, “Let me be very clear in saying that any federally funded program that provides scholarships for private schools must be balanced with direct assistance to [D.C. public schools] and with additional funding for charter schools.” Craig Timberg & Justin Blum, Mayor Endorses Vouchers in D.C., The Wash. Post (May 2, 2003)

² See Justin Blum, Mayor Pursues Vouchers, Public School Aid, The Wash. Post (July 24, 2003); U.S. Cong. Research Serv., District of Columbia Opportunity Scholarship Program (D.C. OSP): Overview, Implementation, and Issues, CRS Report No. R45581, 2 (Mar. 7, 2019).

³ The voucher’s congressional champion at the time, then-Sen. Mike DeWine (R-OH), said about the three-pronged program, “That is what I like about it,” and described the deal as “a very balanced approach, new money, not taking any money away from the public schools.” 149 Cong. Rec. SS11954, SS11977 (daily ed. Sept. 25, 2003)

This bill fails to honor the three-pronged funding compromise for D.C. by substantially decreasing funding for D.C. public schools. This reauthorization would cut public school funding to one-sixth of the total SOAR Act funds and increase funding for the voucher program to one-half of the total (it is currently one-third). In other words, this proposal expands the DC voucher program under the SOAR Act while stripping approximately \$7.5 million per year from current levels from D.C.'s traditional public schools, which educate about 50,000 students, and instead funnels it to private schools that serve less than 2,000 voucher students. Similar to the President's budget, the House's FY 2026 FSGG bill would reauthorize the voucher program through the year 2032, but provides level funding (\$17.5 million) for each program under the SOAR Act. To add insult to injury, the House is also currently considering other deep cuts to Title I funding in appropriations bills that would especially impact D.C. public schools.

Expanding and reauthorizing the D.C. voucher—which has been repeatedly proven unsuccessful in increasing student achievement, is not accountable to federal taxpayers, and which uses public funds to discriminate against populations of students—is at best misguided and at worst a targeted attempt to undermine public education in the district.

The Program Does Not Improve Educational Opportunities for Students

Multiple Congressionally mandated Department of Education studies of the D.C. voucher program have demonstrated that the program does not improve the academic achievement of participating students.⁴ In fact, two recent studies demonstrate that students using vouchers are performing *worse* academically than their peers who are not in the voucher program.⁵ Evidence shows that using a D.C. voucher actually results in a learning loss in math that is on par with the educational impacts of Hurricane Katrina.⁶

The most recent study also found that the voucher program has no effect on parental satisfaction, perceptions of safety, or involvement.⁷ And, previous studies have indicated that many of the students in the voucher program are less likely to have access to key services such as English Learner programs, learning supports, supports and services for students with disabilities, and counselors than students who are not part of the program.⁸ Moreover, a study from the Urban Institute found that receiving a voucher does not increase D.C. students' college enrollment rates.⁹

Congress initially created the voucher in 2003 as a five-year pilot, contingent on students' results in the program evaluations. Having failed to improve the academic achievement and school experience

⁴ U.S. Dep't of Educ., [Evaluation of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program: Impacts Three Years After Students Applied](#) (May 2019) (2019 U.S. Dep't of Educ. Report); U.S. Dep't of Educ., [Evaluation of the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program: Impacts Two Years After Students Applied](#) (June 2018) (2018 U.S. Dep't of Educ. Report); U.S. Dep't of Educ., [Evaluation of the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program: Impacts After One Year](#) (June 2017) (2017 U.S. Dep't of Educ. Report); U.S. Dep't of Ed., [Evaluation of the D.C. Scholarship Program: Final Report](#) (June 2010) (2010 U.S. Dep't of Educ. Report); U.S. Dep't of Ed., [Evaluation of the D.C. Scholarship Program: Impact After 3 Years](#) (Apr. 2009) (2009 U.S. Dep't of Educ. Report); U.S. Dep't of Ed., [Evaluation of the D.C. Scholarship Program: Impact After 2 Years](#) (June 2008) (2008 U.S. Dep't of Educ. Report); U.S. Dep't of Ed., [Evaluation of the D.C. Scholarship Program: Impact After 1 Year](#) (June 2007) (2007 U.S. Dep't of Educ. Report).

⁵ 2018 U.S. Dep't of Educ. Report at 19; 2017 U.S. Dep't of Educ. Report at 11.

⁶ Nat'l Coalition for Public Educ., [Voucher Impacts on Academic Achievement](#) (2023).

⁷ 2019 U.S. Dep't of Educ. Report at 6-9.

⁸ 2010 U.S. Dep't of Educ. Report at 20; 2009 U.S. Dep't of Educ. Report at xxii, 17; 2008 U.S. Dep't of Educ. Report at xviii, 16.

⁹ Matthew Chingos, Urban Institute, [The Effect of the D.C. School Voucher Program on College Enrollment](#) (Feb. 2018).

of the students in the voucher program for nearly two decades, the program clearly does not warrant continuation.

Rather than address concerns about the lack of academic achievement for students in the program, the current administration has chosen to refuse to conduct any more studies into why or how the program fails to improve academic outcomes for students. In February, the Trump-Vance Administration terminated a contract evaluating the program which was [80% complete](#).¹⁰

The Program Lacks Sufficient Oversight and Accountability

According to two GAO reports, the D.C. voucher program has repeatedly failed to meet basic and even statutorily required accountability measures.¹¹ And, an investigation by *The Washington Post* found that participating private schools lack even basic quality controls: these schools were sometimes operated out of run-down storefronts or homes without proper amenities like restrooms and gymnasiums.¹² For example, at one school where 93% of the students had vouchers, students were taught from a “learning model known as ‘Suggestopedia,’ an obscure Bulgarian philosophy of learning that stresses learning through music, stretching, and meditation.”¹³ Even a prior administrator of the program admitted that “quality oversight of the program [w]as sort of a dead zone, a blind spot.”¹⁴

These schools are of such low quality that more than 42% of those participating have had to shut down due to a variety of deficiencies, including fraud and financial mismanagement,¹⁵ and failure to achieve accreditation after more than a decade of attempts.¹⁶ Of the 82 schools that have participated in the program since its creation, 35 have closed their doors.¹⁷

A program with such repeated and serious oversight problems should not continue to be funded by taxpayers.

The Program Endangers Civil Rights, Undermines Constitutional Protections, and Funds Discrimination

Despite receiving public funds, the private schools participating in the D.C. voucher program are not required to abide by all central elements of federal civil rights laws — including Title VI, Title IX, the

¹⁰ The contract with ABT Global LLC to evaluate the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program (contract 91990019C0004) was cancelled on February 10.

¹¹ U.S. Gov’t Accountability Office, [District of Columbia Opportunity Scholarship Program: Actions Needed to Address Weaknesses in Administration and Oversight](#), Publication No. GAO-13-805 (Nov. 2013); US Gov’t Accountability Office, [District of Columbia Opportunity Scholarship Program: Additional Policies and Procedures Would Improve Internal Controls and Program Operations](#), Pub. No. 08-9 at 26 (Nov. 2007).

¹² Lyndsey Layton, [D.C. School Voucher Program Lacks Oversight](#), GAO Says, *The Wash. Post* (Nov. 15, 2013).

¹³ *Id.* (Discussing Academy for Ideal Education).

¹⁴ Lyndsey Layton, [Quality Controls Lacking for D.C. Schools Accepting Federal Vouchers](#), *The Wash. Post*, (Nov. 17, 2012).

¹⁵ For example, Kirov Academy, a ballet school that accepted vouchers, hired a person to be its treasurer even though she had recently spent two years in prison for embezzling money. She stole \$1.5 million from the school over the course of nine months. The school was forced to close due to the ensuing financial difficulties. See Rebecca J. Ritzel, *A Ballet School Rehired an Embezzler. Then \$1.5 Million Vanished*, *The N.Y. Times*, (Mar. 16, 2020).

¹⁶ Two voucher schools described in the Post’s investigation, The Academy for Ideal Education and Academia de la Recta Porta, closed after failing to receive accreditation despite participating in the D.C. voucher program for almost 15 years. See Layton, *Quality Controls Lacking*.

¹⁷ Lauren Lumpkin, *House GOP Would Divert Funds for D.C. Public Schools to Voucher Program*, *The Wash. Post* (Aug. 6, 2023).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act and school accountability standards of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) — that all public schools must meet. Students who attend private schools with vouchers are stripped of their First Amendment, due process, and other constitutional and statutory rights provided to them in public schools.

Of the 37 private schools that participate in the D.C. Voucher program, 34 schools have publicly accessible information about their programs. Of these schools:

- 26 out of 34 schools are religious schools (76.5%)
- 7 out of 34 schools are single-sex schools (20.5%)
- 19 out of 34 schools do not mention protections for LGBTQ+ students (44.1%)
- 18 out of 34 schools do not mention accommodations for students with disabilities (47.1%)

Several schools participating in the D.C. voucher program explicitly state they cannot accommodate students with disabilities or that they can only accommodate students whose needs do not present “undue hardship” to the school. Some examples include:

- **Cornerstone School:** “While we serve a wide range of students, as a smaller school, we are not equipped to effectively serve most students with an active IEP, 504 plan or who are significantly below grade level.”¹⁸
- **Dupont Park Adventist School:** “The administration and instructional team will review a student's documented special needs in order to determine if DPAS can provide sufficient implementation of accommodations and modifications necessary to meet the student's unique educational needs. If after enrollment, a student is identified as having special educational needs, DPAS will determine whether it is an appropriate educational setting for the student, including whether the student will remain enrolled at DPAS.”¹⁹

It is even more important that voucher schools protect students’ civil rights considering that most students in the D.C. voucher program have attended private schools that are deeply racially segregated.²⁰ Schools that do not provide students with fundamental civil rights protections should not be funded with taxpayer dollars.

Thank you for your consideration of our views. If you have any questions, please reach out to NCPE co-chairs Sasha Pudelski, spudelski@aasa.org and Nicole Fuller, nfuller@ncld.org.

Sincerely,

AASA, The School Superintendents Association
AFT, AFL-CIO
Alliance of Baptists

¹⁸ [Admissions Process — Cornerstone Schools of Washington, DC](#)

¹⁹ [Dupont Park Adventist School Student/Family Handbook 2024-2025](#)

²⁰ Mary Levy, [Washington, D.C. Voucher Program: Civil Rights Implications](#), Working Paper for the UCLA Civil Rights Program (Mar. 5, 2018), 23.

Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools
American Atheists
American Civil Liberties Union
American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)
American Humanist Association
American Occupational Therapy Association
Americans United for Separation of Church and State
Association of School Business Officials International (ASBO)
Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty
Center for Inquiry (CFI)
Clearinghouse on Women's Issues
Council for Exceptional Children
Council of Administrators of Special Education
Council of the Great City Schools
EdTrust
Education Law Center
EmpowerEd
Families for Strong Public Schools
Feminist Majority
First Focus Campaign for Children
In the Public Interest
Interfaith Alliance
National Association of Elementary School Principals
National Association of Federally Impacted Schools (NAFIS)
National Association of School Psychologists
National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP)
National Center for Learning Disabilities
National Council of Jewish Women
National Disability Rights Network
National Education Association
National PTA
National School Boards Association
Network for Public Education
Pastors for Children
School Social Work Association of America
The Arc of the United States
The Center for Learner Equity
The Secular Coalition for America
Union for Reform Judaism