

Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Neal, and members of the committee – thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I am here today to support legislation which is in the jurisdiction of both this committee and the Committee on Education and the Workforce, on which I serve. I appreciate the time provided so I can be heard on this bill.

I am here today to support H.R. 531, the Educational Choice for Children Act, or ECCA, which I introduced along with Congressman Adrian Smith of Nebraska. I first introduced this bill in the 117th Congress with our late colleague and friend Jackie Walorski. Jackie was a joyful champion of policies to ensure every child had the resources and education they need to succeed, and this bill is a fitting tribute to her legacy.

As the child of two educators, I was raised in a family that believed strongly in the gift of education and its power to create greater socio-economic mobility. By offering parents and students more educational options, we increase opportunities to succeed . . . and to empower generations to come to make their American Dream a reality.

Our bill is based on popular state-level policies which have been proven to work, like the Children First Education Fund in my home state, and is designed to address critiques of direct government funding of scholarships.

Because ECCA provides a “refundable” tax credit to support scholarship, it diverts no existing funding away from our public schools. It can be compared to other existing tax programs such as the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit and the New Markets Tax Credit.

In order to ensure there is no governmental participation in awarding scholarships for attendance at religious schools, ECCA tax credits and scholarships are directed through independent Scholarship Granting Organizations, or SGOs. These SGOs will both allocate the non-refundable credits to donors and select the families who receive scholarships.

To ensure students in all parts of the country – not just cities and suburbs – can participate, SGOs may also offer assistance with supplemental educational assistance and supplies for families in need – not merely school tuition.

“Ignorant and Free can never be” speaks to the understanding by our founders of the imperative nature of education. The right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness summarizes our nation's mission statement and the vision of a Heavenly Father that puts value on every life regardless of race, creed, color, or zip code. It is time to look for innovative ways to ensure that EVERY child has access to our nation's promise regardless of zip code, income status, color or creed.

Unfortunately, for too many and for far too long, our children have been denied these rights. A 2017 report for the state of California concluded that 75% of Black boys in the state of California could not pass standard reading and writing tests. In Baltimore, across 23 schools, 0% of students showed proficiency in math. In Memphis, Tennessee, this year, 76% of third-graders were not proficient in reading - ONLY 1% were held back.

Not being able to READ, WRITE, THINK or to believe in a country that thrives on success, hard work, merit, risk, failure, and second chances makes the pursuit of life, liberty, and happiness impossible. We're fighting today for the heart and soul of our nation. We cannot accept that the intellectual & educational failure of our own children is the NORM.

This legislation gives us an "ALL IN" approach to assure a WIN/WIN/WIN/WIN. A **Win** for the parent, in particular the poor minority, to see their child reach their potential. A **WIN** for the educational community to allow competition and meritocracy to incentivize innovation and increase value. A **WIN** for caring citizen donors through tax write-offs. And a **WIN** for our most *precious product* - Our children - to become happy, visionary, and productive citizens for their community and our country.

I look forward to working with colleagues on both sides of the aisle to give these options of HR 531 to parents and their children throughout the country.