



March 9, 2009

United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator:

On behalf of the hundreds of concerned clergy of African American Ministers In Action (AAMIA), a program of People For the American Way, we strongly urge you to oppose **Senator Ensign's proposed DC voucher amendment (615) to the omnibus appropriations bill (H.R. 1105)**. Any continued funding of the District of Columbia private school voucher program is unacceptable. As pastors, community leaders, and civically engaged citizens of faith, and in accord with President Obama's call for the elimination of ineffective programs, we stand against any measure or legislation that does not significantly uplift and improve our communities. The DC private school voucher program is one such measure.

By displacing funding, the DC private school voucher program has not only diverted taxpayer money from meeting the critical school safety, repair, and other needs of our congregants and parishioners, but has also failed to provide any significant academic improvements to our children's education. In fact, the most recent findings by the US Department of Education establish that the **DC voucher program has made no significant impact on student achievement**.¹

From the very beginning, AAMIA has stood against the DC private school voucher program – an infringement upon the separation of church and state that fails to adequately protect the civil rights of all students and staff. The DC private school voucher program federally funds and permits private institutions to discriminate against students and staff based upon religion, gender, limited English proficiency, and disability. It even allows merit-based discrimination; while public schools must educate every child, private schools can pick and choose. Hence, those students most in need will continue to be left behind. This has already been shown to occur in evaluations of the DC voucher program.²

Senator, we ask you to make "school choice" a decision to choose what is best for our public schools, our communities and our children. Voting to continually fund the voucher program means agreeing to fund private institutions that are unaccountable to the standards of the No

¹ "Evaluation of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program: Impacts After One Year," Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, June 2007.

² "District of Columbia Opportunity Scholarship Program," U.S. Government Accountability Office, Nov. 2007
"Evaluation of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program: Impacts After One Year," Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, June 2007.

"FLAWS AND FAILINGS: A Preliminary Look at the Problems Already Encountered in the Implementation of the District of Columbia's New Federally Mandated School Voucher Program," People For the American Way Foundation, Feb. 2005.

Child Left Behind Act. Hence, not only do we have financial unaccountability, but academic as well while our public schools continue to fall into disrepair. This is unacceptable.

As faith leaders we must oppose any legislation that ignores and exacerbates the concerns of our communities. Federally funded voucher programs like the DC program symbolize the government's deprioritization of the public schools and therefore its students. Funding for DC public school students should not be leveraged against the continuation of an ideological agenda to promote federal funding of private schools. This is not the role of the federal government. Thus, we ask you – a leader in the Senate – to stand for our communities and oppose funding of a program that ignores the real concerns of the DC public school students and District residents.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Timothy McDonald, III". The signature is written in a cursive style with a prominent initial "T" and "M".

Rev. Timothy McDonald, III
AAMIA Chair