



**Washington
Scholarship
Fund**

February 2, 2010

VIA HAND DELIVERY

The Honorable Arne Duncan
United States Secretary of Education
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20202

Dear Secretary Duncan:

This follows up on our letter to you of December 3, 2009, regarding the future of the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program (the OSP) and the role of the Washington Scholarship Fund (WSF) in administering this watershed program. In our December 3 letter, we informed you that, absent Congressional action in the Fiscal Year 2010 budget process, or by January 31, 2010, providing for a sustainable OSP, WSF would not apply to be the administrator of the OSP beyond the current 2009-2010 school year. A program that serves only existing children and thus significantly shrinks each year – as will be the case with the OSP under current federal law – can neither be effectively administered by a non-profit organization nor be effectively evaluated by the U.S. Department of Education's (ED's) Institute of Education Sciences (IES).

Accordingly, it is with deep disappointment – and with deep frustration at this governmental failure of will – that we now inform you that WSF will not seek to serve as the administrator of the OSP beyond the current 2009-2010 school year. In fact, largely owing to what for all practical purposes is the sure demise of the OSP, WSF will terminate all of its own operations and formally dissolve, subject to completion of its responsibilities under the current contract with the Department of Education.

Please know that we see this development as nothing less than a tragedy for the low-income students and families of the District of Columbia. Congress's indefensible inaction, and

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the current Administration's utter failure to support this indispensable program, have denied thousands of truly impoverished District families the only real chance they had at a meaningful education. As D.C. Public Schools (DCPS) Chancellor Michelle Rhee testified before the Senate last fall, DCPS is currently unable to offer an adequate and effective alternative educational experience to children in the OSP. And the reality is that the majority of OSP students simply do not have access, for a host of reasons, to quality public charter schools. Another result of Congress's decision regarding the OSP will likely be private school closures, which will affect not only participating OSP students, but non-OSP students as well. As a result, D.C. schoolchildren will lose the benefit of existing private financial aid available through those private schools, thus requiring the District to absorb the additional fiscal costs of educating both OSP students and the non-OSP students in closed private schools.

In short, Congress's failure to act to reauthorize the OSP will consign thousands of poor District children to failing and, too often, unsafe schools, and will dramatically and irrevocably diminish genuine educational choice in our nation's capital for our most disenfranchised population. As we stated in our December 3 letter to you, this result constitutes a baffling and inexcusable failing of the highest order on the parts of you, our President, and our duly-elected federal legislature.

Nevertheless, WSF will, of course, fully complete its OSP administrative obligations for the 2009-2010 school year pursuant to the ED grant under which WSF currently is operating the program. Also please be assured that, as WSF informed ED in a letter dated January 26, 2010, WSF remains committed to assisting ED – in any way it can given its resources – to ensure a smooth transition of the OSP's administration to a successor administrator and, hopefully, access by OSP families to the high level of service they have been accustomed to during WSF's tenure as the OSP administrator. To the extent that ED seeks WSF's involvement in this transition, WSF is willing to work with ED in identifying a potential successor administrator of the OSP and to advise ED and/or any successor administrator of the steps needed urgently to be taken regarding the application, scholarship renewal, and other processes so critical to the OSP's sound administration for the 2010-2011 school year.

This deeply regrettable set of circumstances notwithstanding, it has been WSF's great honor and privilege to have stewarded federal funds for the benefit of very low-income school-age children in the District of Columbia through the OSP for the past six years. We take some solace in our steadfast conviction that the OSP and our work have changed the lives of thousands

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of low-income District families who only wanted an equal educational opportunity for their children – and the same chance at a decent future as those with greater means.

Sincerely,



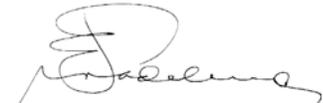
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Gregory M. Cork
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Note: Business affiliations of signatories to this letter are indicated for identification purposes only.

cc: Members of the United States Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Financial Services and General Government
Senator Joseph Lieberman and Senate Co-Sponsors of S. 1552, the Scholarships for Opportunity and Results (SOAR) Act
James Shelton, Assistant Deputy Secretary for U.S. Department of Education Office of Innovation and Improvement
District of Columbia Mayor Adrian Fenty
District of Columbia Public Schools Chancellor Michelle Rhee
District of Columbia Deputy Mayor for Education Victor Reinoso
District of Columbia City Council Members