

DEMOCRATS

for EDUCATION REFORM



April 20, 2009

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

Dear Mr. Secretary:

This is an extremely difficult letter to write. It is difficult because we know that you are a friend not just of ours, but more importantly a friend to the children who are being underserved by the elementary and secondary educational institutions in this country. We don't pretend to know the gravity of the issues you are facing as the U.S. Secretary of Education. But, we cannot remain silent on the actions that are being taken to end the Opportunity Scholarship Program in Washington D.C.

We are not a part of any movement to thwart your efforts or more broadly the overall efforts of President Barack Obama. We applaud him for the courage he is showing by facing up to very difficult problems facing this country and for that he has our support and our appreciation. We are grateful to you for the leadership you are showing in taking a stand against schools that are failing our children, a disproportionate number of whom are poor children of color. Again, we offer our encouragement and our support. But, the fact is the actions to end the Opportunity Scholarship Program are outrageous. This effort flies in the face of the President's promise to end what does not work and keep what does. This is a program that WORKS. It works at two levels: First, it provides a choice for low income and working class parents in Washington D.C. It gives them a small measure of the kind of power that both you and the President are rightfully exercising for your own children. Second, there is evidence that there are children who are benefiting educationally because of the existence of these scholarships.

The one thing we know about both of you is that neither of you are hypocrites. But, by being unwilling to take a strong stand for these children and their families you are allowing yourselves to be placed in that category. It pains us to see you and the President being attacked in this way. But, to be truthful it pains us more to see these children being denied the educational opportunity that the Opportunity Scholarship Program affords them.

Mr. Secretary, ideology and philosophy aside, this is an issue of fairness. It is an issue of social justice. We want you to stand with us on the side of these families and their children. There comes a time where we all have to stand for something no matter what the consequence. This is one of those times. We understand that in the end Congress may kill this program, but Mr. Secretary we want you to be on record as having taking the side of the disenfranchised. We want you to stand with us for the right thing- **Giving low income and working class families the power to choose the best educational option for their children.**

Respectfully,



Kevin P. Chavous
Chair of the Board
Democrats for Education Reform



Howard Fuller, Ph.D.
Chair of the Board
Black Alliance for Educational Options