

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

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Opening Statement Rep. Elijah E. Cummings, Ranking Member

On H.R. 10, "The Scholarships and Results Act" (SOAR Act)

October 9, 2015

I strongly oppose this bill. H.R. 10 would continue the Nation's first federally funded voucher program. It would also continue the effort to undermine the public education system in the District of Columbia.

We must help the District provide a high-quality education for all of the city's children, but we cannot accomplish that objective by diverting public funds to private institutions and away from public schools, which is essentially what a voucher program does.

Public funds should support public education.

Through my work with the Maritime Industries Academy in Baltimore, I understand first-hand the many complexities of turning around struggling inner city schools. I know that we will not succeed in meeting the many needs of our public school systems and the students enrolled in them if we divert taxpayer resources to pay for vouchers for private schools.

H.R. 10 tries to help a few students at the expense of the vast majority of the District's children.

By dividing the funding it authorizes among DC's Public Schools, Public Charter Schools, and private school vouchers, H.R. 10 would provide a third of the resources it would make available to only 1.3 % of the District's students.

The lack of equity is stunning.

Our focus should be on maximizing the impact of the federal government's limited resources to serve ALL of the District's 47,548 students.

Since this bill last passed in 2011, over my strong objection and along party lines, studies of the program have demonstrated that the use of a voucher had no effect on school safety, satisfaction with a school, or motivation and engagement.

Previous studies also show that 50% of the students from the first two cohorts of the DC voucher program eventually dropped out of the program.

Additionally, students in the program are less likely to attend a school that offers support programs for those that are academically challenged or have learning difficulties.

As a longtime advocate of quality education, I support efforts to improve public schools for all students in a manner that is fiscally responsible.

H.R. 10 fails to improve schools and it is not fiscally responsible, which is why I continue to oppose the bill in its current form.

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