



October 21, 2015

**H.R. 10, the SOAR Reauthorization Act,
Fails to Protect Students from Discrimination**

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, a coalition charged by its diverse membership of more than 200 national organizations to promote and protect the rights of all persons in the United States, we urge you to vote against H.R. 10, the Scholarship for Opportunity and Results Reauthorization Act (SOAR). SOAR would reauthorize and expand the federally-funded private school voucher program in the District of Columbia, including provisions that exempt taxpayer-supported schools from federal civil rights laws. We strongly oppose any bill that strips students of these critical civil rights protections.

The D.C. voucher program was created by the D.C. School Choice Incentive Act, which provided funding for a five-year pilot program offering private school vouchers to students in the District of Columbia. That legislation changed well-established law by permitting federal dollars to finance education programs without requiring any corresponding obligation that programs comply with federal anti-discrimination laws (Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964; Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972; Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973; and the Age Discrimination Act).

Like the D.C. School Choice Incentive Act, H.R. 10 fails to ensure that D.C. students receive an equal educational opportunity in private schools subsidized by U.S. taxpayers. Although the bill includes a section prohibiting participating schools from discriminating on the basis of race, color, national origin, or sex, the section falls far short of anti-discrimination requirements under federal law. It does not include disability as a protected basis for discrimination. The bill also does not specify that the types of discrimination it covers would be construed as broadly as the requirements of federal law and it does not afford a means for enforcing the nondiscrimination provision. By contrast, the federal nondiscrimination laws are enforced by the federal government and courts, and persons injured by discrimination are entitled to a complete remedy.

We strongly urge you to oppose H.R. 10 because it fails to provide District of Columbia children with the equal educational opportunity that they deserve. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Nancy Zirkin, Executive Vice President, at zirkin@civilrights.org, or Liz King, Director of Education Policy at king@civilrights.org.

Sincerely,

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