

# THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA TUITION ACCESS GRANT PROGRAM

---

---

## HEARING

BEFORE THE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON FEDERAL WORKFORCE,  
POSTAL SERVICE, AND THE DISTRICT  
OF COLUMBIA

OF THE  
COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT  
AND GOVERNMENT REFORM  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED TENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

ON

### **H.R. 1124**

TO EXTEND THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA COLLEGE ACCESS ACT OF  
1999

MARCH 22, 2007

### **Serial No. 110-20**

---

Printed for the use of the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform



Available via the World Wide Web: <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/congress/index.html>  
<http://www.house.gov/reform>

U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE

37-262 PDF

WASHINGTON : 2007

---

For sale by the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office  
Internet: [bookstore.gpo.gov](http://bookstore.gpo.gov) Phone: toll free (866) 512-1800; DC area (202) 512-1800  
Fax: (202) 512-2250 Mail: Stop SSOP, Washington, DC 20402-0001

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

HENRY A. WAXMAN, California, *Chairman*

TOM LANTOS, California	TOM DAVIS, Virginia
EDOLPHUS TOWNS, New York	DAN BURTON, Indiana
PAUL E. KANJORSKI, Pennsylvania	CHRISTOPHER SHAYS, Connecticut
CAROLYN B. MALONEY, New York	JOHN M. McHUGH, New York
ELIJAH E. CUMMINGS, Maryland	JOHN L. MICA, Florida
DENNIS J. KUCINICH, Ohio	MARK E. SOUDER, Indiana
DANNY K. DAVIS, Illinois	TODD RUSSELL PLATTS, Pennsylvania
JOHN F. TIERNEY, Massachusetts	CHRIS CANNON, Utah
WM. LACY CLAY, Missouri	JOHN J. DUNCAN, Jr., Tennessee
DIANE E. WATSON, California	MICHAEL R. TURNER, Ohio
STEPHEN F. LYNCH, Massachusetts	DARRELL E. ISSA, California
BRIAN HIGGINS, New York	KENNY MARCHANT, Texas
JOHN A. YARMUTH, Kentucky	LYNN A. WESTMORELAND, Georgia
BRUCE L. BRALEY, Iowa	PATRICK T. McHENRY, North Carolina
ELEANOR HOLMES NORTON, District of Columbia	VIRGINIA FOXX, North Carolina
BETTY MCCOLLUM, Minnesota	BRIAN P. BILBRAY, California
JIM COOPER, Tennessee	BILL SALI, Idaho
CHRIS VAN HOLLEN, Maryland	
PAUL W. HODES, New Hampshire	
CHRISTOPHER S. MURPHY, Connecticut	
JOHN P. SARBANES, Maryland	
PETER WELCH, Vermont	

PHIL SCHILIRO, *Chief of Staff*

PHIL BARNETT, *Staff Director*

EARLEY GREEN, *Chief Clerk*

DAVID MARIN, *Minority Staff Director*

SUBCOMMITTEE ON FEDERAL WORKFORCE, POSTAL SERVICE, AND THE DISTRICT OF  
COLUMBIA

DANNY K. DAVIS, Illinois

ELEANOR HOLMES NORTON, District of Columbia	KENNY MARCHANT, Texas
JOHN P. SARBANES, Maryland	JOHN M. McHUGH, New York
ELIJAH E. CUMMINGS, Maryland	JOHN L. MICA, Florida
DENNIS J. KUCINICH, Ohio, <i>Chairman</i>	DARRELL E. ISSA, California
WM. LACY CLAY, Missouri	
STEPHEN F. LYNCH, Massachusetts	

TANIA SHAND, *Staff Director*

## CONTENTS

---

	Page
Hearing held on March 22, 2007 .....	1
Text of H.R. 1124 .....	3
Statement of:	
Fenty, Adrian M., Mayor, District of Columbia .....	6
Harrison, Deborah, vice president, government affairs, Marriott International, Inc., corporate board member of the District of Columbia College Access Program; and Argelia Rodriguez, president and CEO, District of Columbia College Access Program .....	18
Harrison, Deborah .....	18
Rodriguez, Argelia .....	27
O'Leary, Frazier, teacher and coach, Cardozo Senior High School; Emyrtle Bennett, guidance director, Woodrow Wilson Senior High School; Alice M. Boone, management analyst, National Science Foundation, parent of D.C. TAG student, Norfolk State University; and Randa Chappin, executive assistant, the Heart Rhythm Society, D.C. TAG recipient, graduate, American University .....	38
Bennett, Emyrtle .....	43
Boone, Alice M. ....	60
Chappin, Randa .....	63
O'Leary, Frazier .....	38
Letters, statements, etc., submitted for the record by:	
Bennett, Emyrtle, guidance director, Woodrow Wilson Senior High School, prepared statement of .....	46
Boone, Alice M., management analyst, National Science Foundation, parent of D.C. TAG student, Norfolk State University, prepared statement of .....	62
Chappin, Randa, executive assistant, the Heart Rhythm Society, D.C. TAG recipient, graduate, American University, prepared statement of ..	65
Cummings, Hon. Elijah E., a Representative in Congress from the State of Maryland, prepared statement of .....	73
Fenty, Adrian M., Mayor, District of Columbia, prepared statement of .....	9
Harrison, Deborah, vice president, government affairs, Marriott International, Inc., corporate board member of the District of Columbia College Access Program, prepared statement of .....	21
Lynch, Hon. Stephen F., a Representative in Congress from the State of Massachusetts, prepared statement of .....	56
Marchant, Hon. Kenny, a Representative in Congress from the State of Texas, prepared statement of .....	36
O'Leary, Frazier, teacher and coach, Cardozo Senior High School, prepared statement of .....	41
Rodriguez, Argelia, president and CEO, District of Columbia College Access Program, prepared statement of .....	30



## THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA TUITION ACCESS GRANT PROGRAM

THURSDAY, MARCH 22, 2007

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON FEDERAL WORKFORCE, POSTAL  
SERVICE, AND THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA,  
COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM,  
*Washington, DC.*

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 2:08 p.m. in room 2247, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Danny K. Davis (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Present: Representatives Davis of Illinois, Norton, Sarbanes, Kucinich, Lynch, Marchant, and Davis of Virginia (ex officio).

Staff present: Tania Shand, staff director; Caleb Gilchrist, professional staff member; Cecelia Morton, clerk; and Howie Denis, Victoria Proctor, and Alex Cooper, minority professional staff members.

Mr. DAVIS OF ILLINOIS. The subcommittee will come to order.

First of all, let me welcome Ranking Member Marchant, other members of the subcommittee here, and witnesses, all of those in attendance. You will note that some members are not here, and you will note especially that Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton is not present at the moment, but, of course, the reason she is not present is because she is on the House floor as we speak managing the District of Columbia voting rights bill. Hopefully, she will be able to join us.

Of course, we may very well have votes and these kind of things that will disrupt our activity. But out of respect for the time and schedules of some of our distinguished witnesses, we wanted to make sure that we did not delay this hearing and that we would try to stick as close to the schedule as possible.

Welcome to the Federal Workforce, Postal Service, and the District of Columbia Subcommittee hearing on the District of Columbia Tuition Access Grant, D.C. TAG, program.

Hearing no objection, the Chair, ranking member, and subcommittee members will each have 5 minutes to make opening statements, and all Members will have 3 days to submit statements for the record.

I will proceed with an opening statement.

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to the first hearing of the Subcommittee on the Federal Workforce, Postal Service, and District of Columbia, which we will hold on District-related matters.

I am pleased to have joined Ranking Member Tom Davis and Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton in sponsoring H.R. 1124, a bill to extend the District of Columbia College Access Act of 1999. The act, H.R. 1124, reauthorizes funding for the District of Columbia tuition assistance grant, the D.C. TAG program, which has helped to promote higher education for high school graduates in the District of Columbia.

D.C. TAG provides grants for District high school students to attend public colleges and universities nationwide at in-state tuition rates. Additionally—and this is a very important provision of the bill—it provides smaller grants for District students to attend private institutions in the D.C. metropolitan area and to historically black colleges and universities [HBCUs], nationwide.

The impact of this legislation on the community and in the lives of the students who receive the grant cannot be overstated. D.C. TAG reaches students in communities where there is little hope to being able to attend and afford a college education. This is particularly true for many of the students that participate in D.C. TAG.

Of the students that participate in the program, 58 percent come from very low-income households. The percentage of males participating in the program increased from 8 percent in 2001 to 41 percent in 2006. That bodes well for black males, who are statistically more likely to end up in the criminal justice system than matriculating at a college or university.

Furthermore, students who participate in the program are attending educational institutions that are known to nurture students of color. Five of the top 10 private schools that these students attend are HBCUs: Hampton University, Morehouse College, Virginia Union University, St. Augustine's College, and Bennett College.

While students from all races participate in the program and attend over 270 institutions in 47 States, including nationally recognized public institutions like the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, the University of Illinois, the University of California-Berkeley, and the Ohio State University, it is a program that serves a community that is starving for attention and resources—students of color from low-income households and HBCUs.

Again I commend Representatives Davis and Norton for establishing this program, and I look forward to hearing firsthand how D.C. TAG has impacted students, recipients, their parents, and outlook on life.

I would now like to ask Representative Sarbanes from Maryland if he has any comments.

[The text of H.R. 1124 follows:]

110TH CONGRESS  
1ST SESSION

# H. R. 1124

To extend the District of Columbia College Access Act of 1999.

---

## IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

FEBRUARY 16, 2007

Mr. TOM DAVIS of Virginia (for himself, Ms. NORTON, and Mr. DAVIS of Illinois) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform

---

## A BILL

To extend the District of Columbia College Access Act of 1999.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*  
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. 5-YEAR REAUTHORIZATION OF TUITION AS-**  
4 **SISTANCE PROGRAMS.**

5 (a) PUBLIC SCHOOL PROGRAM.—Section 3(i) of the  
6 District of Columbia College Access Act of 1999 (sec. 38–  
7 2702(i), DC Official Code) is amended by striking “each  
8 of the 7 succeeding fiscal years” and inserting “each of  
9 the 12 succeeding fiscal years”.

4

2

1 (b) PRIVATE SCHOOL PROGRAM.—Section 5(f) of  
2 such Act (sec. 38–2704(f), DC Official Code) is amended  
3 by striking “each of the 7 succeeding fiscal years” and  
4 inserting “each of the 12 succeeding fiscal years”.

○

Mr. SARBANES. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

This is actually my first opportunity to participate in a hearing of this subcommittee, so I am glad to be here. I am 9 weeks into this new job.

Welcome, Mayor Fenty.

A couple of things. First of all, it is District of Columbia Day on the Hill, for the reasons that our chairman indicated. I, for one, and I know he and others, many in this Congress are looking forward for the District of Columbia to have a voting representation in Congress that is so well deserved and to allow an incredible advocate like Eleanor Holmes Norton to take her advocacy just one level higher. As effective as she has been without this right, I can't even imagine what is going to happen when she gets it. We all look forward to that.

This program, the D.C. TAG program and the underlying legislation that we are seeking to reauthorize, is just absolutely critical for young people in the District of Columbia who are trying to make their way forward. It reminds me of a documentary that I saw a couple years back which was focusing on a dropout recovery program in the District of Columbia.

It focused on one family where, in the generation of cousins and brothers in that extended family of about 10 or 12 young men, all of whom sadly had dropped out of high school, there was one young man who came back in through the recovery program and was moving his life forward and stood ready to take advantage of a college opportunity that was there. At the last minute, the funding for that fell through, and when it fell through he fell through the cracks again and ended up dropping out.

What was so poignant about that documentary was that they interviewed one of his cousins who had long since given up hope that he would ever have this opportunity himself, and had sort of vicariously put all of his hopes and dreams into this cousin of his, and his disappointment was palpable. I remember him saying—I will never forget—he said it would have been enough for me in my lifetime in my life if my cousin had this opportunity. It makes you stop and think, when young people's aspirations are so compromised that they can't even imagine for themselves opportunity and need to project it on to others.

This program offers tremendous opportunities to young people in the District of Columbia. It doesn't occur to most folks that the District of Columbia doesn't have its own State university system, and therefore can't offer that kind of "in-State" tuition opportunity that others have, and so to have a mechanism in place that allows families and students to take advantage of the higher education opportunity is critical.

I am very pleased to be here and be part of the hearing today and look forward to the reauthorization of this important legislation and look forward to hearing your testimony, Mr. Fenty.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. DAVIS OF ILLINOIS. Thank you very much.

If there are other witnesses present, would you come and take those front seats up there, so that when we get ready to swear people in we can swear everybody in at the same time.

We will now proceed to hear testimony from the witnesses. Of course, should other Members come in, we would provide them opportunity to make opening statements if they so desire.

Our first witness is going to be the Honorable Adrian M. Fenty, who won the Democratic nomination for D.C. Mayor on September 12, 2006. He received 57 percent of the vote and won every precinct in the city. He served two terms as a councilman representing ward 4. He waged a vigorous campaign, in which he emphasized that government must serve the priorities of its people. He unveiled his own proposal, the District of Columbia Education Reform Amendment Act of 2007, in an effort to improve the D.C. educational system.

We will go ahead and swear in all the witnesses who are present, and so if you would all stand.

[Witnesses sworn.]

Mr. DAVIS OF ILLINOIS. The record will show that each witness answered in the affirmative. Thank you very much. You may be seated.

Please know that your entire statements will be entered into the record. Of course, we use these lights around here. They are kind of like stop, go, get ready to stop, and all those kind of things. But the green light indicates that you have 5 minutes in which to summarize your statement. The yellow light means that your time is running down and that you have 1 minute remaining, and, of course, the red light means that your time has expired.

We will now proceed and hear testimony from the Honorable Mayor of the city of Washington, DC, Mayor Fenty.

Mr. Mayor, please proceed.

**STATEMENT OF ADRIAN M. FENTY, MAYOR, DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**

Mayor FENTY. Thank you very much. I am glad to be here on District of Columbia Day. No two better issues we could be discussing here on the Hill than voting rights and education, and we thank both of you for your support on voting rights, as well.

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee on the Federal Workforce, Postal Service, and the District of Columbia, good afternoon. My name is Adrian M. Fenty, and I am the fifth elected Mayor of the District of Columbia. I want to thank you for calling this important hearing and for the opportunity to testify today.

I also want to acknowledge and thank our Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton for her tireless dedication to the constituents that we both share.

I am here today to express my support for the congressional reauthorization of the District of Columbia Tuition Assistant Grant Program, or D.C. TAG. This program deserves the continued support of Congress for two reasons: one, because we need it; and, two, because it works.

A little bit about the program. Simply put, D.C. TAG is a program that helps high school graduates in the District of Columbia go to college. It helps them go to college with the same options as high school graduates from the 50 United States. In the 50 States, students have the option of multiple universities and colleges on multiple campuses. For example, neighboring Maryland has 14 4-

year public university campuses and 16 community colleges. That is about one campus for every 180,000 residents. In the District of Columbia we have just one campus, the University of the District of Columbia, for all 572,000 residents.

State colleges and universities are well known for providing a quality education at an affordable price. That price is especially affordable for students who go to school in their home States. The D.C. Tuition Assistance Grants Program puts higher education within reach by bridging the gap between in-State and out of State tuition at a State university. It provides up to \$10,000 per academic year, up to a lifetime maximum of \$50,000, for District residents who have a high school diploma and start college by the age of 24.

Other options are up to a \$2,500 per academic year to bridge the gap between in-State and out of State tuition at a community college, or up to \$2,500 per academic year to attend a private, historically black college or university anywhere in the Nation, or a private university in the District of Columbia metropolitan area.

In 1999, Congress passed D.C. TAG at the urging of our own Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton. To date, including the current school year, the program has disbursed \$154 million. The D.C. TAG Program started in school year 2000–2001. Since that time, more than 11,000 young people have taken advantage of our Government's offer for help with their tuition bills.

Looking at the statistics from another angle, in the years since the program began, the number of District of Columbia public school students going to college has doubled. I want to say that one more time. The number of students going to college from our public schools has doubled. That is a phenomenal achievement for a program that is only in its 7th year.

D.C. TAG has put our college enrollment in line with the national average, but numbers, alone, don't tell the story of our program's success. This is one of those occasions where my constituents tell their own stories far better than I ever could. I will share with you the words of Wezlynn Davis, whose daughter Niya graduated from North Carolina Central University last year.

Ms. Davis writes, "We, the Davis family, have been truly blessed by the District of Columbia Tuition Assistance Program. I don't know what we would have done without it. I hope that the program continues in the future and the process won't change much, because I have another youngster who will be attending college. He wants to be a culinary chef, and has his mind set on it. Thank you for all you and others are doing to make sure our black children succeed," writes Ms. Davis. "It gives them self worth and a sense of pride knowing that they can afford to attend college. I know my daughter is happy. She graduated on May 6, 2006, the first one of my children to do that. I am ecstatic," she concludes.

Niya Davis is now an administrative assistant at Georgetown University Hospital. Hers is just one of the D.C. TAG Program's success stories. I ask you to imagine 11,000 success stories, with more yet to come.

In conclusion, the District of Columbia, like other governments across the country, has a public policy of encouraging as many of its young people as possible to go to college. The average male col-

lege graduate earns 70 percent more than a male high school graduate in the United States, and the average female graduate earns almost 80 percent more. We need to make these opportunities available to anyone who wants them, regardless of income.

The D.C. Tuition Assistance Program creates more opportunities for District of Columbia students to go to college. Of those in the program, just like Niya Davis, 38 percent are the first in their family to do so. That number is shrinking as we enroll younger siblings in D.C. TAG, and we are hoping 1 day to get it to zero.

We are changing a way of life for an entire generation of young people, and I would like to call upon you, Chairman Davis, and your colleagues to reauthorize D.C. TAG once again.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I look forward to answering any questions.

[The prepared statement of Mayor Fenty follows:]

**H.R. 1124: "TO EXTEND THE DISTRICT OF  
COLUMBIA COLLEGE ACCESS ACT OF 1999"**

**COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON FEDERAL WORKFORCE, POSTAL SERVICE  
AND THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**

**THE HONORABLE DANNY K. DAVIS, CHAIRMAN**



**TESTIMONY OF ADRIAN M. FENTY  
MAYOR  
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**

**THURSDAY, MARCH 22, 2007**

INTRODUCTION

Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee on Federal Workforce, Postal Service and the District of Columbia. My name is Adrian M. Fenty, and I am the fifth elected Mayor of the District of Columbia. I want to thank you for calling this important hearing, and for the opportunity to testify today. I also want to acknowledge and thank our Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton for her tireless dedication to the constituents we both share.

I'm here today to express my support for the congressional re-authorization of the District of Columbia Tuition Assistance Grant Program, or DC TAG. This program deserves the continued support of Congress for two reasons: because we need it, and because it works.

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

Simply put, DC TAG is a program that helps high school graduates in the District of Columbia go to college. It helps them go to college with the same options as high school graduates from the 50 United States.

In the 50 states, students have the option of multiple universities and colleges on multiple campuses. For example, neighboring Maryland has 14 four-year public university campuses and 16 community colleges. That's about one



campus for every 180,000 residents. In the District of Columbia, we have one campus – the University of the District of Columbia – for all 572,000 residents.

State colleges and universities are well known for providing a quality education at an affordable price. That price is especially affordable for students who go to school in their home states.

The DC Tuition Assistance Grant program puts higher education within reach by bridging the gap between in-state and out-of-state tuition at a state university. It provides up to \$10,000 per academic year – up to a lifetime maximum of \$50,000, for District residents who have a high school diploma and start college by the age of 24. Other options are: up to \$2,500 per academic year to bridge the gap between in-state and out-of-state tuition at a community college, or up to \$2,500 per academic year to attend a private historically-black college or university anywhere in the nation, or a private university in the District of Columbia Metropolitan Area.

In 1999, Congress passed DC TAG at the urging of our own Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton. To date, including the current school year, the program has disbursed \$154 million.



#### DC TAG HIGHLIGHTS

The DC TAG program started in school year 2000-2001. Since that time, more than 11,000 young people have taken advantage of our government's offer for help with their tuition bills. Looking at the statistics from another angle, in the years since the program began, the number of District of Columbia Public Schools students going to college has *doubled*.

I want to say that one more time. The number of students going to college from our public schools has *doubled*. That's a phenomenal achievement for a program that's only in its seventh year. DC TAG has put our college enrollment in line with the national average.

#### SUCCESS STORIES

But numbers alone don't tell the story of our program's success. This is one of those occasions where my constituents tell their own stories far better than I ever could. So I will share with you the words of Wezlynn Davis, whose daughter Niya graduated from North Carolina Central University last year. Ms. Davis writes:

"We, the Davis family, have been truly blessed by the District of Columbia Tuition Assistance Program. I don't know what we would have done without it.



“I hope that the program continues in the future and the process won't change much because I have another youngster who will be attending college. He wants to be a culinary chef and has his mind set on it.

“Thank you for all you and others are doing to make sure our black children succeed. It gives them self worth and a sense of pride knowing that they can afford to attend college. I know my daughter is happy. She graduated on May 6, 2006. The first one of my children to do that. I am ecstatic.”

Niya Davis is now an administrative assistant at Georgetown University Hospital. Hers is just one of the DC TAG program's success stories. I ask you to imagine 11,000 success stories, with more yet to come.

#### CONCLUSION

The District of Columbia, like other governments across the country, has a public policy of encouraging as many of its young people as possible to go to college. The average male college graduate earns 70 percent more than a male high school graduate in the United States, and the average female graduate earns almost 80 percent more. We need to make these opportunities available to anyone who wants them, regardless of income.



The DC Tuition Assistance Program creates more opportunities for District of Columbia students to go to college. Of those in the program, just like Niya Davis, 38% are the first in their family to do so. That number is shrinking as we enroll younger siblings in DC TAG, and we're hoping one day to get it to zero. We're changing a way of life for an entire generation of young people, and I would like to call upon you and your colleagues to re-authorize DC TAG once again.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today, and I look forward to answering any questions.

Mr. DAVIS OF ILLINOIS. Thank you very much, Mr. Mayor. We will proceed. We are delighted that you do have time for a few questions.

I have never been a mayor, but I have been a member of a city council and I have some awareness of how busy a mayor's schedule must be in terms of trying to get around to all the pot holes and all of the other things that exist and make sure the trees are trimmed.

Mayor FENTY. I had a lot of hair when I was elected, Mr. Chair.

Mr. DAVIS OF ILLINOIS. So I understand what it is like. But let me begin the questioning process.

It is hard for me to imagine that any students would not want to take advantage of the program, but can you share with us what the District is doing and plans to do to try and make sure that there is maximum participation on the part of eligible students?

Mayor FENTY. Well, I think we have a situation that exists where we are spending the lion's share of the dollars appropriated, so I think we have shown that if money is put there we will market the program and get students to participate, but I think the District of Columbia is fully prepared if this is reauthorized to make sure that even more young people use the program. Our guidance counselors are doing a better job every year getting people involved.

My office, through our State education officer, Debra Gist, works in collaboration with those counselors. As we go forward, we would love to amend and give you a real detailed plan that shows you exactly everything that we are doing, but we are very sufficient and very confident that the number of people in the system can not only use the dollars, but will grow each year.

Mr. DAVIS OF ILLINOIS. The Government Accountability Office did a study back in 2005, and they reported that 35 percent or 35.6 percent of the 3,094 students receiving D.C. TAG funds failed to adequately demonstrate their eligibility. What steps have been taken since the release of this study or this report to verify the eligibility of individuals for the program?

Mayor FENTY. Well, in short, Mr. Chair, our State Education Office, and I am joined by our director, our State Education Officer Debra Gist, on my left, has made sure that we have made the changes that we thought were necessary. Many of those problems I think were surrounding "applicants who had unusual circumstances," and the eligibility of students with unusual circumstances is now documented through the professional judgment form, which has been approved and signed by the Higher Education Financial Services director.

We think that we have not only been able to address that, but three other major findings in the GAO audit. A lot of the problems that were reviewed in the GAO audit study stem from the first couple of years of the program, and it is running 100 percent more smoothly now.

Mr. DAVIS OF ILLINOIS. And my last question, can you think of anything that we, as Members of Congress, might be able to do to improve or make even more effective this very worthwhile program?

Mayor FENTY. Well, I think in the short term a reauthorization puts us on sound footing. We believe that the amount that is being discussed for fiscal year 2008 is an appropriate amount. I don't think there is any question, though, if we want to keep the program as strong as it is right now, in future years there will have to be some bump up. Tuition is going up at the colleges.

More people are enrolling, as you said, as we market this to more people, and more students, which we clearly will do. What will happen is, if we keep it at that \$35 million level, less people will be able to use the program. So in the short term we think a reauthorization will suffice, and we think we have ironed out many of the details, but in the long term we will have to slowly increase it to be able to keep the same number of people in the program.

Mr. DAVIS OF ILLINOIS. Thank you very much, Mr. Mayor.

Now we will turn to Representative Sarbanes, if he has any questions.

Mr. SARBANES. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Just a couple of quick questions, and they are sort of related to what you already said. Do you have a sense of whether there is pent-up demand for the program now among high school students that, with sufficient funding, could be accommodated, or is there sort of this interplay with raising awareness first before the pipeline kind of fills to the max?

Mayor FENTY. I get the sense that there probably is some ability to put more people in, in the short term, but there is absolutely an ability to put more people in the long term. That is why I said to the Chair that reauthorization in the current fiscal year at the current dollars that are discussed for fiscal year 2008 would be appropriate, but that as we go forward, we will be able to get more people involved.

One of the things that we should look at is, as in a place like the University of Virginia, for example, the delta between what the in-State tuition is and the \$10,000 cap per year is still about \$6,000, so a student has to pay that \$6,000 on top of the \$10,000 grant. That in the District of Columbia, like in any urban place, could make UVA or any university that has a similar delta between in-State and out of State tuition unaffordable for a young person. So I think that is kind of what we may want to address in the future years, as well as I think there is no question we can increase the numbers.

One of the things we did today was announce that Bill and Melinda Gates have put \$112 million into sending more kids from the District of Columbia to college. Well, those young people very likely are going to want to go to in-State colleges also. So we think that we can increase the numbers into the future.

Mr. SARBANES. I thank you for that, because it is careful when we talk about the resource question to not see it simply in terms of being able to enhance numbers, because if we can't cover the differential—

Mayor FENTY. That is right.

Mr. SARBANES [continuing]. And, in fact, it is not going to get those numbers coming in.

Has there been any evidence that the existence of the program has—I mean, one can see where graduates would step in the pro-

gram like that. Is there any evidence that it has discouraged drop-outs in some cases because a student can see as they are looking out 2 or 3 years down the road, here is an opportunity that I thought maybe I didn't have, and it helps to keep them on track and in school? Is there anecdotal or statistical evidence of that?

Mayor FENTY. We probably could provide you a list of those types of stories, but suffice it to say that the simple fact that we are sending so many first-time students that are the first in their families to graduate I think is almost anecdotal in itself that we have some young people who otherwise would not have gone to college. Since the program has started here in Congress, we have doubled the number of kids going to college in the District of Columbia. That is a statistic that is directly tied to your continued support of the program.

I think there are other benefits, as well. Although you represent Maryland, we are not trying to send a whole lot of constituents your way if we don't have to.

Mr. SARBANES. I understand.

Mayor FENTY. And people will flee the District of Columbia if they don't have the same type of resources available. This puts us on parity, and I think more people have stayed in the city because of it, which is healthy for all of us, because we want the District of Columbia to succeed for the region.

Mr. SARBANES. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman, I note that, even though the rationale for establishing this program is based on peculiar and sort of exceptional characteristics of the District of Columbia, unwittingly perhaps it can serve in some respects as a model for what we should be doing more of with respect to offering opportunity for higher education in this country across the country in terms of the kinds of assistance that ought to be offered there to help people bridge this gap, because the cost of higher education is fast becoming a great separator in the society at large. So the effectiveness of a program like this, the evidence that it is working smoothly, statistics on how it is allowing young people to make that journey forward I think is very helpful to that larger discussion on higher education across the country.

Thank you.

Mr. DAVIS OF ILLINOIS. I want to thank you so much, Representative Sarbanes, for your comments.

Mr. Mayor, I want to congratulate you and the city of Washington, DC, on the Bill and Linda Gates Foundation grant. I think that should go a long way. And I will also share with you that I was able to visit earlier today with the publisher of the Washington Post who spoke very favorably about this program as one of the bright signs of what is taking place in the District of Columbia.

I will end my comments. Malcolm X said that education is our passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs to those who prepare today. I think that this certainly will go a long way toward helping to prepare young people, so we thank you for your testimony.

Mayor FENTY. Thank you.

Mr. DAVIS OF ILLINOIS. We appreciate your being here.

Mayor FENTY. Thank you. If you have any followup questions, we will definitely get you information. We can't thank both of you

enough for your support for this program and for the District of Columbia, in general. Thank you.

Mr. DAVIS OF ILLINOIS. Thank you.

We will now proceed with our additional witnesses. Today we have two panels. It may very well make sense. Do we have any additional witnesses who came and didn't come up to the front? If so, then we would ask you to just come and take a seat up here in these seats that are reserved for witnesses.

We will go then to our second panel. Our second panel: Ms. Deborah Marriott Harrison and Argelia Rodriguez. Ms. Harrison is the vice president of Government Affairs for Marriott International, Inc. She is a member of the D.C. College Access Program, called D.C. CAP Board. The D.C. CAP Board consists of 17 corporations and foundations that raise funds to help enable District public high school students to enter and graduate from college.

Welcome, and thank you very much.

Ms. Rodriguez is the president and CEO of D.C. CAP. She is responsible for operating 18 college information centers in public schools around the city, administering over \$2.5 million in scholarship funds each year, and providing college and financial counseling to more than 16,000 high school and college students and their parents.

We will begin with Ms. Harrison.

**STATEMENTS OF DEBORAH HARRISON, VICE PRESIDENT,  
GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS, MARRIOTT INTERNATIONAL, INC.,  
CORPORATE BOARD MEMBER OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  
COLLEGE ACCESS PROGRAM; AND ARGELIA  
RODRIGUEZ, PRESIDENT AND CEO, DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  
COLLEGE ACCESS PROGRAM**

**STATEMENT OF DEBORAH HARRISON**

Ms. HARRISON. Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman and subcommittee members. It is an honor for me to be here today before your subcommittee to express my strong support and that of the entire D.C. CAP Board for the reauthorization of the D.C. College Access Act.

In 1999 the chairman and chief executive officers of Mobil Corp., Lockheed Martin, Fannie Mae, Marriott, and the Washington Post embarked on an ambitious program to substantially increase the number of public high school students in the District of Columbia who gain admission to college and remain there throughout graduation. I would like to stress the importance of the graduation part. We have a model program of retention. There are others that want to copy this program. We have higher than the national average of students actually graduating from college, which is very important to us.

These CEOs went out into the business community and raised \$30 million, which allowed the D.C. College Access Program to be able to be launched, but we cannot do this without assistance from the Federal Government, without the assistance of the D.C. TAG program and the D.C. Access Program.

Mr. Fenty and you all have described the program very well, and so I would like to reiterate the statistic that since D.C. CAP has been in existence the last 7 years the number of students has risen

from 30 percent to 60 percent of those who go to college and graduate, but there is still a lot more work to be done. Only 9 percent of all entering freshmen into the 9th grade actually go to college and graduate from college from the District of Columbia, so there is a lot of work to be done.

I would like to digress from the written statement, if I may, and tell you a personal story of how I have been involved with some real-life students and tell you how this directly impacts real-life people.

I have been involved on more than 10 boards, most of them non-profits, and this has been the most rewarding association or organization that I have ever been able to be with, because I have seen how it makes a difference in people's lives. I am also involved with our church youth group, where we have over 200 high school students that we organize in Montgomery County and in the District of Columbia.

Two years ago one of my girls that I have become close to named Dominee wanted to go to college. She went to her D.C. CAP advisor, and that is part of the program that makes this so special is each high school has a D.C. CAP counseling center in the schools. I would like to say that the guidance counseling offices in the high schools are empty, but the D.C. CAP offices are bustling and are very active and have a lot of energy.

She approached her counselor. Her counselor helped her navigate through the system of applying to many colleges and also helped her gain scholarships and financial rewards through the system. She got her D.C. CAP scholarship, her TAG scholarship, and many others, and was able to garner \$22,000 so that she could go to school.

Two years ago she was accepted to the University of Pennsylvania, the Altoona campus. I threw my arms around her and gave her a hug and said, this is great, you are going to college. This is wonderful. She said, I am not going. I said, there is no choice. You are going. Why do you not want to go?

She said that she comes from what I would call a typical inner-city family where her mother disappeared when she was about 3 years old. Her father has been in prison most of her life and is a drug addict. She and her mentally retarded sister were raised by her grandmother. She was worried about who would take care of her grandmother and her sister. She was worried about the extra \$2,000 she would have to raise in order to go to college. She had no support or encouragement from home to go. She was afraid to go to college because she didn't feel she had been adequately prepared for the rigors of university life, and she was the first in her family to ever go to college.

I took her and two of her friends up to the university campus and we had a tour. They showed her the dorms where she would stay. She met her teachers. She met other students. I am happy to say that she and her two friends are now finishing their sophomore year at Penn State and that she is doing very well. She is breaking the cycle in her family of poverty and of self-defeat.

I would like to strongly, strongly encourage and recommend a 5-year reauthorization of the D.C. College Access Act and full funding of the D.C. Tuition Assistance Grant Program. I can assure you

that this program does affect real people and real lives and gets them out of the cycle of self-defeat and poverty.

I am very proud to be a member of this, and I would be happy to take any questions that I can answer.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Harrison follows:]

21

TESTIMONY OF  
DEBORAH MARRIOTT HARRISON

ON

H.R. 1124:

“TO EXTEND THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA COLLEGE ACCESS ACT OF 1999

BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE FEDERAL WORKFORCE, POSTAL SERVICE  
AND THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

THE HONORABLE DANNY K. DAVIS, CHAIRMAN

THURSDAY, MARCH 22, 2007

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee:

It is an honor for me to appear before your committee to express my strong support – and that of the entire board of the DC College Access Program – for the reauthorization of the DC College Access Act.

In 1999, the chairmen and chief executive officers of Mobil Corporation, Lockheed Martin, Fannie Mae, Marriott and The Washington Post Company embarked on an ambitious program to substantially increase the number of public high school students in the District of Columbia who gain admission to college and remain there through graduation.

Mobil chairman Lucio Noto, Lockheed Martin chairman Vance Coffman and Washington Post Company chairman Donald E. Graham solicited the support of other major Washington-based companies and foundations, and ultimately they raised more than \$30 million to launch the DC College Access Program, or DC-CAP.

A DC-CAP board of directors comprising major donors and community leaders was created, with members now including representatives of the Boeing Company, Morris & Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation, Capitol One, ExxonMobil, Fannie Mae Foundation, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Philip L. Graham Fund, Greater Washington Urban League, Kimsey Foundation, Robert & Arlene Kogod Foundation, Lockheed Martin, J. Willard & Alice S. Marriott Foundation, Eugene & Agnes Meyer Foundation, Object Media, Sallie Mae Foundation, Catherine Reynolds Foundation, the Summit Fund of Washington for AES Corporation, Verizon and the Washington Post Company. The Mayor of Washington, DC, and the Superintendent of DC Public Schools are also ex officio members of the board.

Donald Graham was elected president of the board and now serves as its chairman.

The Sallie Mae Foundation, in addition to making a major grant to DC-CAP, helped establish all of the high school counseling centers.

The Marriott Foundation helped furnish DC-CAP's administrative offices and now underwrites the Senior/Parent Luncheons at which DC-CAP and DC State Education Office officials explain the college application and college aid procedures to thousands of students and their parents.

Capital One helped develop DC-CAP's marketing materials, including improvements to the website, and the Fannie Mae Foundation has conducted highly useful research on college attendance by DC students. Verizon and ExxonMobil assign summer interns to DC-CAP, and several board members support the Sallie Mae 10K race

and the Tony Kornheiser-Michael Wilbon Celebrity Golf Classic, both of which benefit DC-CAP annually.

#### **The DC College Access Act**

Also in 1999, leaders of DC-CAP, with support from the city and the Clinton Administration, encouraged the United States Congress to enact legislation under which the Federal government would pay the difference between in-state and out-of-state tuition for DC students attending colleges and universities throughout the nation.

Under the unique circumstances of the District of Columbia, there is no State university system available to DC students, no choice of publicly-financed colleges and universities beyond the University of the District of Columbia. These circumstances led to the anomaly of DC students paying three times as much in tuition as Virginia students were required to pay to attend the same Virginia college on the Washington, DC subway line.

With the enactment of the DC College Access Act of 1999 -- championed in the House of Representatives by DC Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton and Virginia Congressman Tom Davis, and in the Senate by Ohio Senator George Voinovich and Illinois Senator Dick Durbin -- Congress remedied this inequity and created a "virtual" State university system that dramatically expanded the higher education choices of students from the District of Columbia. Admission standards remained the same; only the financing was changed for DC students.

#### **The Power of Partnership**

The founding of DC-CAP and the passage of the DC College Access Act (and with it the creation of the DC Tuition Assistance Grant program) combined to provide much greater support to DC students with college ambitions.

As a result of these combined efforts, DC public high school students are applying to college --and being accepted -- in record numbers. While DCPS statistics prior to 1999 did not comprehensively track the college admission rates of public high school graduates, DC-CAP research suggests that the number of DCPS graduates going on to college almost doubled -- from 30% to 58% -- between the 1998-1999 and 2005-2006 school years.

These figures, while remarkable in any context, are all the more so because the children of the DC Public Schools come, in overwhelming numbers, from low-income, single-parent, minority households and are almost always the first in their families to attend college.

DC-CAP is unique among the nation's college access programs, in that every DC public high school student is eligible for its services, regardless of academic history,

grade point average, family income, citizenship status, ethnicity, special education eligibility, delinquency or juvenile criminal history.

While many other such programs establish criteria that disqualify some students from participation, the principal operating philosophy of DC-CAP is that every high school student has the right to an opportunity to improve his or her quality of life through a college education.

### **The Current Level of Effort**

In its eighth year of operation, the DC College Access Program currently funds full-time counselors serving nearly 12,000 students in 20 DC public high schools.

DC-CAP is providing college retention services to 5,300 students attending almost 600 colleges and universities in 35 States nationwide, and is providing \$2,600,000 annually in Last Dollar Award scholarships to 1,350 students attending 222 colleges and universities.

The privately-funded endowment of DC-CAP has now grown to more than \$37 million, thanks to additional gifts by several original board members, contributions by major new donors such as The Boeing Company, Capital One and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and the highly successful investment of endowment funds by Ruane, Cunniff and Company.

Six percent of endowment funds are spent on annual operating expenses. In the 2006-2007 fiscal year, this percentage will contribute more than \$2 million of a total general operating budget of \$5 million.

Additional income is derived from annual fund-raising events including the Sallie Mae 10K Race and the Tony Kornheiser-Michael Wilbon Celebrity Golf Classic, which generate combined revenue of \$400,000 annually for DC-CAP.

Cooperation from the school system, from the Superintendent (who sits on the DC-CAP board) to the principals and school faculty, has been exemplary.

Mayor Anthony Williams (also an ex officio member of the board) was a staunch supporter of DC-CAP from the beginning, as well, and both the Clinton and Bush Administrations have recommended full funding of the DC Tuition Assistance Grant program despite significant restraints on other domestic spending. Congress has appropriated the full amount of Administration requests every year -- \$35.2 million in fiscal year 2006 -- and has routinely reauthorized the program.

With the combined efforts of DC-CAP, DC-TAG, DCPS, the Mayor's office and, most importantly, DC students and their families, the District of Columbia's overall college attendance and graduation figures are very encouraging.

Sixty percent of the 2,373 DCPS graduates from the Class of 2006 went on to college, compared with about 30 percent from the Class of 1999.

A total of 8,400 DCPS students have been admitted to college since the inception of DC-CAP, and to date 935 have graduated.

Forty percent of the 1,400 DC public high school students entering college in the 2001-2002 academic year are expected to graduate by Spring 2007. This five-year graduation rate is 40 percent, which is below the national average of 47 percent but well above the average for African-American students. It is also three times the estimated college graduation rate of DCPS students prior to the establishment of the DC College Access Program.

### **The Challenge of the Future**

From the beginning, the DC College Access Program has benefited from its partnerships with the Washington area's major corporations and philanthropies, with the DC Public Schools, with the Mayor of Washington and the DC State Education Office, with the Clinton and Bush Administrations, and, crucially, with the Congress of the United States.

This public-private partnership has repeatedly been cited as model for the nation by a succession of US Secretaries of Education, by Members of the US House of Representatives and US Senate, and by many generous donors.

We have an opportunity now to expand this partnership profoundly with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's major commitment -- announced just today -- to its "Double the Numbers" initiative with the DC Public Schools.

This initiative will help improve academic performance and reduce the drop-out rate in the District's public schools -- in concert with the Superintendent's Master Education Plan -- and it will include, among other things, a major new scholarship program for 250 college-bound DC students.

These initiatives will be managed by the DC College Access Program, which is being given a \$10 million challenge grant by the Gates Foundation as part of DC-CAP's new \$40 million capital campaign to enable us to expand our work to the District's charter schools, where more than a quarter of DC students are now enrolled.

With the Gates Foundation's imprimatur, DC-CAP is better prepared to appeal to foundations nationwide for financial support of a program that has proven its value.

But these private efforts cannot succeed without the continued support of the Congress for the DC College Access Act and the Tuition Assistance Grant program authorized by the Act.

Our philanthropic resources, while significant, would simply be overwhelmed without the congressional program that allows DC students to attend college at in-state tuition rates.

This is a program that works. It does what it is intended to do. Its results in the past seven years have been dramatic and measurable, and its prospects for future success are bright indeed – if Congress will keep faith with us and with the children of the District of Columbia who depend on you for this vital assistance.

The Gates Foundation’s “Double the Numbers for College Success” report found that “a good education is particularly essential in the DC area. In 2000, more than half the jobs in the District of Columbia were held by employees with a bachelor’s degree or higher – almost twice the national average.

Moreover, the DC metro area ranks sixth in the nation in the New Economy Index, which looks at the concentration of managerial, professional and technical jobs, according to a report from the DC Workforce Investment Council.

Matching these good jobs with a better-educated District population is the mission of the board of DC-CAP.

We strongly recommend a five-year reauthorization of the DC College Access Act – and full funding of the DC Tuition Assistance Grant program – and we assure you that this Federal investment will continue to pay very real and specific dividends that can be measured in better education, better employment prospects and a more successful city that all Americans can be proud to call their Nation’s Capital.

Mr. DAVIS OF ILLINOIS. Thank you very much, Ms. Harrison. We appreciate your comments and certainly you being here with us today.

We will now go to Ms. Rodriguez. You may proceed.

**STATEMENT OF ARGELIA RODRIGUEZ**

Ms. RODRIGUEZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee. I appreciate this opportunity to speak to you today.

With the passage of the D.C. College Access Act of 1999 the same year our privately funded D.C. College Access Program was founded by major Washington area companies and foundations, our unique public-private partnership has had extraordinary results. In the 7-years since the passage of the D.C. College Access Act and the founding of D.C. CAP, our research suggests that now twice as many D.C. public high school students go on to college, and three times as many graduate from college within 5 years.

These figures, while remarkable in any context, are all the more so because the children of the D.C. public schools come in overwhelmingly large numbers from low-income, single parent, minority households, and are almost always the first in their families to attend college.

D.C. CAP is unique among the Nation's college access programs in that every D.C. public high school student is eligible for its services, regardless of academic achievement, grade point average, family income, ethnicity, special education eligibility, delinquency, or criminal history. While many other such programs establish criteria that disqualifies some students from participation, the principal operating philosophy of D.C. CAP is that every high school student has the right to an opportunity to improve his or her quality of life through a college education.

Counseling begins with ninth grade students, informing them that college is a possibility, helping them understand the economic and other benefits of college education. Later in their high school careers students are assisted with standardized achievement test preparation and administration, college selections, admissions applications, and financial aid strategies.

Since the inception of D.C. CAP, its high school counseling centers have provided thousands of individual and group counseling sessions, as well as financial aid seminars for students and their families, administration of SAT and ACT exams, and assistance with college educations, enrollment, and registration.

Once accepted in an accredited 2-year or 4-year college or university or vocational school, students from the District of Columbia are eligible for D.C. CAP's last dollar awards of up to \$2,000 a year for up to 5 years. Not every student receives the last dollar award, but it is based on financial need rather than academic performance. After all other available public and private financial assistance has been identified and obtained, students still needing more assistance can qualify for last dollar awards.

Since its inception through the 2005–2006 academic year, D.C. CAP will have awarded more than 5,300 last dollar awards totaling approximately \$2 million.

A second unique feature of the D.C. College Access Program is its continued support of students for up to 5 years of college

through their college careers. This support is not confined to financial assistance, but it also includes mentoring, academic and administrative support, a toll-free hot line, on-campus visits by counselors, regular financial aid and scholarship correspondence, college tours, and D.C. CAP campus college representatives.

In its 8th year of operation, the D.C. College Access Program currently funds full-time counselors serving nearly 12,000 students in 18 D.C. public high schools.

D.C. CAP has provided college retention services to over 2,000 students attending over 600 universities and colleges around the country, and is currently providing \$2.5 million annually in last dollar award scholarships to approximately 1,200 students attending 230 colleges and universities.

A total of 8,400 D.C. public school students have been admitted to college since the inception of D.C. CAP, and nearly 1,000 have already graduated.

With the help of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the D.C. College Success Foundation, we are now prepared to extend our services to the charter schools, where more than a quarter of D.C. students are now enrolled. We expect the universe of college-bound students from the District of Columbia to grow even larger in the years ahead.

Because of this important act, these achievements simply would not have been possible without the passage of the legislation. Under the unique circumstances of the District of Columbia, there is no State university system available for D.C. students, no choice of publicly financed colleges and universities beyond the University of the District of Columbia. These circumstances lead to the anomaly of D.C. students paying three times as much tuition as Virginia students were required to pay to attend the same Virginia college taking the D.C. subway line.

With the enactment of the D.C. College Access Act of 1999, Congress remedied this inequity and created a virtual State university system that dramatically expanded the higher education choices of students from the District of Columbia. From the beginning, the legislation has enjoyed broad bipartisan support here in Congress. Both the Clinton and Bush administrations have recommended full funding of the D.C. Tuition Assistance Grant, despite significant restraints on domestic spending. Congress has appropriated the full amount of administration requests every year, \$35.2 million in fiscal year 2006, and has routinely reauthorized the program.

Because of this legislation, because of you, D.C. students now have not only a chance but a choice in higher education, and they have made the most of it. Of D.C. college students, 40 percent are graduating within 5 years—still below the national average of 52 percent, but above the 38 percent average for African Americans throughout the country. We expect further improvement in this D.C. graduation to as much as 44 percent within the next year. Without the Federal tuition contribution authorized by the D.C. College Access Act, most of these students would not only not graduate from college, they would have never gone to college in the first place. The financial barrier would have simply been too high, the dream of college education too far to reach.

You should be proud of supporting a Federal program that actually works, and it works very well. The D.C. College Access Act is working exactly as it was intended to work, and it is achieving results no one would have dared predict 7 years ago.

We are grateful for your support and we are hopeful we can count on it in the future.

Thank you very much.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Rodriguez follows:]

30

TESTIMONY OF  
ARGELIA RODRIGUEZ  
PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER  
DC COLLEGE ACCESS PROGRAM

ON

H.R. 1124:

“TO EXTEND THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA COLLEGE ACCESS ACT OF 1999

BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE FEDERAL WORKFORCE, POSTAL SERVICE  
AND THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

THE HONORABLE DANNY K. DAVIS, CHAIRMAN

THURSDAY, MARCH 22, 2007

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and members of the Committee.

I appreciate this opportunity to appear before your committee to urge the reauthorization of the DC College Access Act and the DC Tuition Assistance Grant program.

Since the passage of this Act in 1999 – the same year our privately-funded DC College Access Program was founded by major Washington-area companies and foundations – our unique public-private partnership has had extraordinary results.

In the seven years since the passage of the DC College Access Act and the founding of DC-CAP, our research suggests that twice as many DC public high school students go on to college now, and three times as many graduate from college within five years.

While DCPS statistics prior to 1999 did not comprehensively track the college admission rates of public high school graduates, DC-CAP research suggests that the number of DCPS graduates going on to college almost doubled -- from 30% to 58% -- between the 1998-1999 and 2005-2006 school years.

These figures, while remarkable in any context, are all the more so because the children of the DC Public Schools come, in overwhelming numbers, from low-income, single-parent, minority households and are almost always the first in their families to attend college.

DC-CAP is unique among the nation's college access programs, in that every DC public high school student is eligible for its services, regardless of academic history, grade point average, family income, citizenship status, ethnicity, special education eligibility, delinquency or juvenile criminal history.

While many other such programs establish criteria that disqualify some students from participation, the principal operating philosophy of DC-CAP is that every high school student has the right to an opportunity to improve his or her quality of life through a college education.

After the first year's pilot program, DC-CAP expanded its college counseling service to include a full-time counselor and College Information Resource Center in each of the District's 19 public high schools.

Counseling begins with 9<sup>th</sup> grade students, informing them that college is a possibility, helping them understand the economic and other benefits of a college education, and advising them on course selection and academic performance standards that can help them gain admission to college.

Later in their high school careers, students are assisted with standardized achievement test preparation and administration, college selection, admissions applications, and financial aid strategies.

Since the inception of DC-CAP, its high school counseling centers have provided thousands of individual and group counseling sessions, as well as financial aid seminars for students and their families, administration of SAT and ACT exams, and assistance with college applications, enrollment and registration.

#### **Last Dollar Awards**

Once accepted in an accredited two-year, four-year college, university or vocational school, students from the District of Columbia are eligible for DC-CAP Last Dollar Awards of up to \$2,000 a year for up to five years.

Not every student receives this Last Dollar aid, but it is based on financial need rather than academic performance. After all other available public and private financial assistance has been identified and obtained, students needing still more assistance may qualify for Last Dollar Awards.

Since its inception through the 2005-2006 academic year, DC-CAP will have awarded more than 5,300 Last Dollar Awards scholarships totaling approximately \$10 million.

#### **College Retention Services**

A second unique feature of the DC College Access Program is its continued support of students for up to five years of their college careers. This support is not confined to financial assistance but also includes mentoring, academic and administrative support, a toll-free hotline, on-campus visits by retention counselors, regular financial aid and scholarship correspondence, college tours, summer pre-college programs and orientation materials.

#### **The Current Level of Effort**

In its eighth year of operation, the DC College Access Program currently funds full-time counselors serving nearly 12,000 students in 18 DC public high schools -- about 90 percent of the collective student body.

DC-CAP is providing college retention services to 10,069 students attending 600 colleges and universities nationwide, and is providing \$2,500,000 annually in Last Dollar Award scholarships to 1,179 students attending 222 colleges and universities.

A total of 8,400 DC Public School students have been admitted to college since the inception of DC-CAP, and nearly a thousand have already graduated.

With the help of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the DC College Success Foundation, we are now preparing to extend DC-CAP's college counseling, retention and financial assistance programs to the District's charter schools – where more than a quarter of DC's students are now enrolled – and we expect the universe of college-bound students from the District of Columbia to grow even larger in the years ahead.

#### **The DC College Access Act**

These achievements simply would not have been possible without the passage of the DC College Access Act, under which the Federal government pays the difference between in-state and out-of-state tuition for DC students attending colleges and universities throughout the nation.

Under the unique circumstances of the District of Columbia, there is no State university system available to DC students, no choice of publicly-financed colleges and universities beyond the University of the District of Columbia.

These circumstances led to the anomaly of DC students paying three times as much in tuition as Virginia students were required to pay to attend the same Virginia college on the Washington, DC subway line.

With the enactment of the DC College Access Act of 1999, Congress remedied this inequity and created a “virtual” State university system that dramatically expanded the higher education choices of students from the District of Columbia. Admission standards remained the same; only the financing was changed for DC students.

The Federal contribution is capped at \$10,000 per year for up to five years for students attending public colleges and universities nationwide. In addition, the government pays up to \$2,500 a year to assist students attending private colleges in the Washington area and Historically Black Colleges and Universities nationwide.

From the very beginning, this legislation has enjoyed broad bipartisan support here in the Congress. Both the Clinton and Bush Administrations have recommended full funding of the DC Tuition Assistance Grant program despite significant restraints on other domestic spending. Congress has appropriated the full amount of Administration requests every year -- \$35.2 million in fiscal year 2006 -- and has routinely reauthorized the program.

Because of this legislation – because of you – DC students now have not only a chance but a choice in higher education, and they have made the most of it.

Forty percent of DC's college students are graduating within five years – below the national average of 52 percent but above the 38 percent average for African American students nationwide. We expect further improvement in this DC graduation rate – to as much as 44 percent – within the next year.

Without the Federal tuition contribution authorized by the DC College Access Act, most of these students would not only not graduate from college – they wouldn't have gone to college in the first place. The financial barrier would have simply been too high, the dream of a college education too far out of reach.

You should be proud of supporting a Federal program that actually works – and works very well. The DC College Access Act is working exactly as it was intended to work, and it is achieving results no one would have dared predict seven years ago.

We are grateful for your support, and we hope we can count on it in the future.

**x x x**

Mr. DAVIS OF ILLINOIS. Thank you very much for your comments. We have been joined by the ranking member of this subcommittee, Representative Marchant, and I will defer to him at this moment for any comments that he might want to make and any questions he might have for the witnesses.

Mr. MARCHANT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

For the sake of time, I will submit my opening statement for the record and apologize. The floor voting schedule got very confused in the last 30 minutes, so I was on the floor expecting to be voting. I apologize for my tardiness.

Mr. Chairman, I will submit this for the record.

I would just say that it is a great privilege to me to hear this testimony from you today, both of you ladies, and that it looks to me like this program is working very well. I am very open to helping with the reauthorization of it.

[The prepared statement of Hon. Kenny Marchant follows:]

**Committee on Oversight and Government Reform  
Subcommittee on Federal Workforce, Postal Service,  
and the District of Columbia**

**Hearing on H.R. 1124, "To Extend the District of Columbia  
Access Act of 1999"**

**Statement of Ranking Member Kenny Marchant**

**March 22, 2007 at 2:00 p.m. in 2247 Rayburn HOB**

Mr. Chairman, thank you for convening this hearing. This afternoon we will focus on H.R. 1124, a bill to extend the District of Columbia College Access Act of 1999.

H.R. 1124 will reauthorize the DC College Access Act so city residents can continue to attend colleges and universities at in-state tuition rates. I understand that this bill is bolstered by the inclusion of DCTAG funding in the Presidents' FY 2008 budget submission.

At the height of the District's financial troubles in the 1990s, the city could not provide even the most basic public services to its residents. Those who could afford to move fled the city. Thanks in large part to former Committee Chairman Tom Davis and his efforts to pass the DC Control Board Act and the DC Revitalization Act, the city is getting back on track.

As former mayor of Carrollton, Texas, I understand the importance of creating and maintaining a strong tax base. It's the lifeblood of any city. And education is a critical factor parents consider when deciding where to raise their children. Since D.C. does not have a public university system like the states do, DCTAG is an innovative way to attract families back to the nation's capital by allowing students to enjoy college tuition assistance similar to that of college-bound students in the 50 states.

I look forward to hearing more about the DCTAG program from the witnesses and learning more about it affect on D.C. students.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. HARRISON. Thank you.

Ms. RODRIGUEZ. Thank you.

Mr. DAVIS OF ILLINOIS. Thank you very much.

I will ask representative Sarbanes if he has any questions.

Mr. SARBANES. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

A quick question. Before, was the College Access Program that was pulled together in 1999—I take it that is when it was launched?

Ms. RODRIGUEZ. Yes.

Mr. SARBANES. Was it pulled together in response to the TAG opportunity; is that right?

Ms. RODRIGUEZ. In collaboration.

Mr. SARBANES. In collaboration with it.

Ms. RODRIGUEZ. Collaboration.

Mr. SARBANES. OK. So what I was curious about is before TAG what was the level of commitment or involvement by similar actors with respect to moving young people into higher education from the District of Columbia.

Ms. RODRIGUEZ. Well, I think that before 1999 there were many corporations and foundations who were acting in good faith but individually. I think in 1999 really the stars aligned. The corporations, the foundations, the city, with the enactment of the act everything came together and we mobilized around this specific issue. And, as you know, there is strength in numbers, and I think that is what has made all the difference in the world.

Mr. SARBANES. I worked in Baltimore for about 8 years in education. There are a number of programs, college-bound programs that exist there. I know that the business community and private sector is very careful about the kind of commitments they make in public education, because they want to make sure that they are leveraging as much as they can. I think that what we see here is the opportunity where the public side of this partnership was really what made it appealing to the private sector.

Again, I think that there is a lesson in this that can be applied much more widely than with respect to the District of Columbia in terms of the public sector stepping in, particularly with respect to cost, and getting part of the way, a substantial part of the way down the road in terms of making an opportunity available and affordable to a young person so that then there is an incentive for the private sector to step in and do that last dollar grant, or whatever it might be.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. DAVIS OF ILLINOIS. I am going to forego any questions. I want to thank both of you ladies for your testimony. We are going to be having votes later on and we need to try to get as many of the witnesses in as we can before votes. I really want to thank you for your testimony. We appreciate it. Thank you very much.

Ms. HARRISON. Thanks.

Ms. RODRIGUEZ. Thank you.

Mr. DAVIS OF ILLINOIS. I am going to ask if panel three would come: Frazier O'Leary, Jr.; Dr. Emyrtle Bennett; Alice M. Boone; and Randa Chappin.

Let me just read the introductions.

Frazier O'Leary, Jr., is a teacher and coach at Cardozo High School. He is a consultant for the College Board in English Language and Literature, Virtual Teams, and Pre-AP. He has encouraged and advised hundreds of students about the value and importance of participating in D.C. TAG.

Dr. Bennett is the head guidance counselor for Wilson High School. She is responsible for the academic, social, and developmental needs of Wilson students. She facilitates and manages the college/work/career process of the student population and has a son who recently finished law school and was a recipient of D.C. TAG.

Alice Boone is a management analyst to the associate inspector general for investigations at the National Science Foundation. She is a single mother with three children. She has one child who is a recipient of D.C. TAG.

And Randa Chappin is a single mother who graduated from the American University with a B.A. degree in communications and urban development in May 2005. She is the executive assistant to the vice president of communications and marketing at the Heart Rhythm Society and was a recipient of D.C. TAG.

It is the custom, of course, that we swear in all witnesses. I think we have one witness who was not sworn in with the rest, or two, Ms. Boone and Ms. Chappin.

[Witnesses sworn.]

Mr. DAVIS OF ILLINOIS. The record will show that each witness answered in the affirmative.

Please know that your entire statements will be entered into the record. We would ask that you summarize your testimony in 5-minute statements. The green light will come on, and it just simply means that you have 5 minutes. When it gets down to sort of a yellow or colored-looking light, then that means that you have 1 minute and you are expected to begin to kind of wrap up your testimony. Of course, the red light means the same thing that it does out on the street, and that is stop.

We thank you all so much for being here. We will begin with Mr. O'Leary.

**STATEMENTS OF FRAZIER O'LEARY, TEACHER AND COACH, CARDOZO SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL; EMYRTLE BENNETT, GUIDANCE DIRECTOR, WOODROW WILSON SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL; ALICE M. BOONE, MANAGEMENT ANALYST, NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION, PARENT OF D.C. TAG STUDENT, NORFOLK STATE UNIVERSITY; AND RANDA CHAPPIN, EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT, THE HEART RHYTHM SOCIETY, D.C. TAG RECIPIENT, GRADUATE, AMERICAN UNIVERSITY**

**STATEMENT OF FRAZIER O'LEARY**

Mr. O'LEARY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen.

My name is Frazier O'Leary, and I have been teaching English in the D.C. public schools for 37 years, the last 30 at Cardozo High School in northwest Washington.

Mr. DAVIS OF ILLINOIS. Congratulations.

Mr. O'LEARY. Thank you very much.

Mr. DAVIS OF ILLINOIS. Thirty-seven years.

Mr. O'LEARY. It has been 37 years of fun.

One of my primary goals as an educator has been to try to prepare my students for post-secondary education. Outside of their education, there has been no greater service provided to our students during my career than the D.C. TAG program. Since the overwhelming majority of our students qualify for free and reduced lunch, which is another way of saying that there is no money available for college education in their households, the D.C. TAG program has allowed our students to widen their horizons as far as selection and location of colleges and universities. It has also provided them with needed financial assistance.

Those of you who have children who have gone to college or have children who will go to college have faced or will face the same question that the parents or caregivers of our students in D.C. face: how will I pay for my child's college education?

Your answer might sound something like this: I will use the equity on my house, or I will take out a loan, or I will dip into my savings, or I will borrow against my insurance policy to take care of my child. The vast majority of adults who are raising our children in D.C. do not have that answer as an option. There is no equity in a one-bedroom rental or in section 8 housing. You need collateral in order to take out a loan. You can't dip into a savings account if there is no savings account. Many of the parents or caregivers do not even have life insurance. Most of our graduates who go on to college are the first members of their family to be able to do so, and D.C. TAG is the vehicle for this journey.

As you planned or will plan for your child's college education, it was or will be a matter of weighing options. Put yourself in a place where there are no options and then think about how the D.C. TAG offers hope to the parents and the children.

Although we spend most of our time teaching, we as educators also spend time advising students, encouraging students, cajoling students, and even harassing students about the value of a college education because there is not one student in our schools who doesn't have the same American dream. That dream is to have a good-paying job, a home, a car, and a family. It is the same American dream you had.

It is often said that Members of Congress are reelected because of the care that they give to their constituents. Our students and their caregivers have lives filled with unbelievable everyday obstacles that can thwart the achievement of this dream. Our students, our constituents need to be taken care of, too.

This December Cardozo's advanced placement program will host its sixth annual AP reunion. This event allows graduates of our AP program to come back and talk to the current students about college life and beyond. It is probably no coincidence that the students who came back to our fifth reunion last December were almost all recipients of the D.C. TAG awards.

These students, many of them in college or college graduates or graduate students would not have been able to reach their goals without the support of this invaluable program. You are all officially invited to our next reunion in December so that you can hear their stories and share their successes.

I have always believed that public servants, teachers, and elected officials have one primary responsibility, and that is to advocate for those who need help.

The D.C. TAG is such an advocacy program. It has been a God-send for thousands of students. It has opened doors for them that were previously shut. There is nowhere you can go in this city and not bump into someone who has been a recipient of this program.

We often hear words about future leaders and how they are formed. I would be willing to guarantee that the future leaders of this city will have been allowed to grow because D.C. TAG provided the impetus.

Please allow the current and future students of our high schools the same opportunity that these grateful recipients have had and reauthorize H.R. 1124 so that future high school graduates in our city will benefit from a program that provides them with a level playing field and a chance to live the American dream.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. O'Leary follows:]

H. R. 1124: "TO EXTEND THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA COLLEGE  
ACCESS ACT OF 1999"

The Honorable Danny K. Davis, Chairman

Testimony of Frazier L. O'Leary, Jr.

Thursday March 22, 2007

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. My name is Frazier O'Leary and I have been teaching English in the DC Public Schools for thirty-seven years, the last thirty at Cardozo High School in Northwest Washington.

One of my primary goals as an educator has been to try to prepare my students for post-secondary education. Outside of their education, there has been no greater service provided to our students during my career than the DCTAG program.

Since the overwhelming majority of our students qualifies for free and reduced lunch, which is another way of saying that there is no money available for college education in their households, the DCTAG program has allowed our students to widen their horizons as far as selection and location of colleges and universities. It has also provided them with needed financial assistance.

Those of you who have children who have gone to college or have children who will go to college have faced or will face the same question that the parents or caregivers of our students in DC face: how will I pay for my child's college education?

Your answer might sound something like this. I will use the equity on my house or I will take out a loan or I will dip into my savings or I will borrow against my insurance policy to take care of my child.

The vast majority of adults who are raising our children in DC do not have that answer as an option. There is no equity in a one-bedroom rental or in Section Eight housing. You need collateral in order to take out a loan. You can't dip into a savings account if there is no savings account. Many of the parents or caregivers do not even have life insurance. Most of our graduates who go on to college are the first members of their family to be able to do so and DCTAG is the vehicle for this journey.

As you planned or will plan for your child's college education, it was or will be a matter of weighing options. Put yourself in a place where there are no options and then think about how the DCTAG offers hope to the parents and the children.

Although we spend most of our time teaching, we, as educators, also spend time advising students, encouraging students, cajoling students, and even harassing students about the value of a college education because there is not one student in our schools who doesn't have the same American Dream.

That dream is to have a good paying job, a home, a car, and a family.

It's the same American Dream you had.

It is often said that members of Congress are re-elected because of the care that they give to their constituents.

Our students and their caregivers have lives filled with unbelievable everyday obstacles that can thwart the achievement of this dream. Our students, our constituents, need to be taken care of too.

The DCTAG offers a chance for our students to realize that dream. When I talk to the students about the program, I use the University of Hawaii as an example. A student who graduates from Cardozo could go to the University of Hawaii and pay in-state tuition. We haven't had anyone go there yet but we do have students spread out all over the country who would never have had the opportunity if not for this program.

This December, Cardozo's Advanced Placement program will host its Sixth Annual AP Reunion. This event allows graduates of our AP program to come back and talk to the current students about college life and beyond. It is probably no coincidence that the students who came back to our fifth reunion last December were almost all recipients of the DCTAG awards.

These students, many of them in college or college graduates or graduate students, would not have been able to reach their goals without the support of this invaluable program. Listening to their speeches over the past five years allowed me to think about how far they had come since they were in high school and the major role that DCTAG played in their development. You are all officially invited to our next reunion in December so that you can hear their stories and share their success.

I have always believed that public servants, teachers, and elected officials have one primary responsibility and that is to advocate for those who need help. DCTAG program is such an advocacy program. It has been a godsend for thousands of students. It has opened doors for them that were previously shut.

There is nowhere you can go in this city and not bump in to someone who has been a recipient of this program. We often hear words about future leaders and how they are formed. I would be willing to guarantee that the future leaders of this city will have been allowed to grow because the DCTAG provided the impetus.

Please allow the current and future students of our high schools the same opportunity that these grateful recipients have had and reauthorize H.R. 1124 so that future high school graduates in our city will benefit from a program that provides them with a level playing field and a chance to live the American Dream.

Thank you.

Mr. DAVIS OF ILLINOIS. Thank you very much. If I had been young enough, I would have been delighted to be a student in one of your classes. We appreciate you.

Mr. O'LEARY. Well, you have an open invitation to please come and talk to my students.

Mr. DAVIS OF ILLINOIS. Thank you very much.  
Dr. Bennett.

#### **STATEMENT OF EMYRTLE BENNETT**

Ms. BENNETT. Good afternoon Chairman Davis and distinguished members of the subcommittee.

As a certified professional counsel for the D.C. public schools, I welcome this opportunity to testify before the Subcommittee on Federal Workforce, Postal Service, and the District of Columbia regarding H.R. 1124.

To the mayor in his absence and the Honorable Eleanor Norton Holmes, to Ms. Gist and D.C. CAP, and all the other constituents who are helping in D.C. public schools, as a counselor at the Woodrow Wilson High School, the largest high school in the Nation's Capital, I am excited to be here today in regards to reauthorization of the District of Columbia Tuition Assistance Grant Program.

As a veteran educator of 30-plus years and a recent law graduate, I am committed to the mission of educating and lobbying on behalf of the students and parents of the Washington, DC, area. I could have turned my head the other way and stayed in the comforts of my office at Woodrow Wilson High School, but when I thought of the students that come through my office every day I had to be here on their behalf to plead to you to continue your support to extend the much needed D.C. TAG program.

I shudder to think what would happen to the lives of our young people if we take away the opportunity for them to have access to a quality and equitable education as afforded to students in other States.

It would be hard for me not to say anything on behalf of young people who had no choice of where they or their family live, but yet deserve a better chance to higher education. I want to speak for our students. They look up to me and expect me to lobby on their behalf so that this funding would not be taken away, as well as their aspirations for higher education.

As a result of reauthorization of the D.C. TAG program, you would be providing equity and access to college to D.C. public school students and investing in our city and the Nation.

College education benefits not only the individual student, but also society, as a whole. D.C. youth deserve as much access to excellent higher education as their peers in other States. For many of our students, the thought of paying for college over the next 4 years can be daunting and can discourage many from even applying. However, the D.C. TAG program has made college more attainable and provided opportunities to students who otherwise would not have the means to pay for post-secondary education.

As the Chair of the Guidance Department at Woodrow Wilson High School in the District of Columbia, we have been instrumental in helping D.C. students graduate from high school and achieving their dreams of a college education with the D.C. TAG. During

my tenure, we have increased our student enrollment in universities and colleges in more than 45 States across the country and the District of Columbia. As a result of the TAG program, there were 301 students in the class of 2006 who headed off to college in 171 schools in 41 States, Canada, and the Czech Republic; 336 students headed off in 2005. You are welcome to review the remainder of our collected data since my start at Wilson in 2002.

We believe the significant increase of college placements from 114 in 2002 to 301 in 2006 is a direct impact of the tuition assistance grants and of good guidance that, in turn, rewards students with educational opportunities available to D.C. public high school graduates.

More access to higher educational opportunities with increases in financial aid packages and support from the D.C. TAG will benefit our students.

The D.C. TAG has many successes. At Wilson since my tenure I have witnessed my second college graduation of students using the funds from D.C. TAG. For many of those students, D.C. TAG influenced their post-secondary plans. I am proud to say that I had the privilege of working with a former student of mine from Coolidge High School who last year was teaching music at Wilson. What a living testimony that is. There are many more just like him. Many of them are here with me today willing to share their stories of D.C. TAG support and to personally influence each of you to reauthorize H.R. 1124.

Many of them have come back to D.C. to give back. Some are teachers. Others are working in D.C. and the metropolitan area, while others have chosen to return to our local consortium of colleges and universities to study medicine, law, and other forms of higher education. They, too, have their stories to share, but let me share just a couple.

Shareem returns from the University of Michigan. She will graduate in May, and she has been accepted to at least two law schools.

Brian, a first-generation Chinese student, needed D.C. TAG to go away to college. In turn, it gave his three siblings and parents great joy to see their child go to college and have a better way of life, as it also allowed the family more space in their two-bedroom apartment.

Dwayne, a victim of gun violence in his junior year at Wilson, would not have been able to break the cycle of violence without his D.C. TAG and ability to go away to college in a new geographical location, and now he returns older and wiser.

Last, my son, who is seated in the back, with D.C. financial assistance was able to go to college and receive an undergraduate degree, a master's degree, and will complete his law degree in May. He has come back to D.C. energized, and he is committing his time and talent to help students in D.C. by running for the D.C. School Board in the May 2007 election.

Many parents of students have asked me to share their concerns about the impact that this D.C. TAG will do if you reauthorize it.

Again, thank you Mr. Chairman for this opportunity to testify today before the subcommittee. I am committed to working with each of you and the subcommittee to ensure that this bill is reauthorized for the District of Columbia public school graduates.

I will be happy to answer any questions.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Bennett follows:]

46

Testimony of

**Dr. Emyrtle Bennett**

*H.R. 1124*

*"To extend the District of Columbia College Access Act of 1999"*

Subcommittee on Federal Workforce, Postal Service, and the District of Columbia

March 22, 2007, 2:00 p.m.

Room 2247

Rayburn House Office Building

Good afternoon, Chairman Davis and distinguished members of the Subcommittee on Federal Workforce, Postal Service, and the District of Columbia. As a Certified Professional Counselor for the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS), I appreciate this opportunity to testify on H.R. 1124, "To extend the District of Columbia College Access Act of 1999," which reauthorizes the District of Columbia Tuition Assistance Grant Program (DCTAG).

As a counselor at the Woodrow Wilson Senior High School (Wilson), the largest high school in the nation's capital, I am excited to be here today to support the reauthorization of DCTAG. As a veteran educator of thirty plus years and a recent law graduate, I am committed to lobbying to promote and increase improved education opportunities for students and parents in Washington, DC. It would have been very easy for me to ignore this issue and remain in the comfort of my office. However, after considering the enormous impact of a retraction of DCTAG on District of Columbia students, I knew that it was necessary for me to plead for your continued support to extend the much-needed DCTAG program. I shudder to think what would happen to the lives of the District of Columbia's youth if the opportunity to access the same quality of education afforded to students in other states was taken away. For this reason, it was impossible for me to sit silent and not speak on behalf of these young people who because of their socio-economic status could be eliminated from an equal opportunity to access higher education. So today I stand on behalf of countless DC students and families who are not present, but are expecting and hoping that my testimony will protect their desires and dreams of an opportunity to seek an affordable higher education will not be destroyed.

**The Impact of the DCTAG on District of Columbia Students**

DCTAG was created by the US Congress in 1999 through the District of Columbia College Access Act; and later amended by the DC College Access Improvement Act of 2002 to expand higher education choices for college-bound residents of the District of Columbia. DCTAG compensates the District for its lack of state university systems by allowing our high school college bound students to attend out-of-state public universities at in-state-tuition rates and providing grants for attending selected private universities.

DCTAG drastically increased college options available to residents of the District of Columbia (DC) by permitting students to attend public institutions in neighboring jurisdictions at in state tuition costs. Between 1998 and 2000, the number of DC residents attending public institutions in Virginia and Maryland more than doubled. As a result of DCTAG's success, colleges and universities in other states were later included in this tuition program, which increased the number of DC residents attending these institutions as well. Increased numbers were most eminent at public 4-year institutions and historically black institutions. In addition, the overall college entry rates also increased for DC residents. The number of first-time federal financial aid recipients, first-year college students receiving Pell Grants and the number of DC residents listed as freshmen increased by more than 15 percent, however the number of graduates from DC public high schools remain dismal.

Today, DCTAG has successfully created opportunities for DC residents to access post secondary education. Continued support of DCTAG is imperative to provide District residents' continued opportunities and better options for college.

With over twenty-one years of educating students in the District of Columbia, beginning at the Sidwell Friends School through my current employment at the Woodrow Wilson Senior High School, I understand the importance of recognizing the abilities and talents of children. I confidently affirm that there are students throughout the District of Columbia who are bright, have the aptitude and potential for success, and are simply looking for an opportunity to realize their dreams and maximize their potential. Based upon my experience in guidance and counseling, the following recommendations will improve the college access and college graduation rates for District of Columbia students.

#### **Improved Guidance Counseling**

High school college counseling is a multi-dimensional mission that encompasses personal, academic and occupational counseling. College counselors play an integral role in helping students not only plan their futures, but also to help make their dreams a reality. Thereby, counselors directly impact students by assisting them to access available educational opportunities.

Due to a shortage of licensed professional counselors for high school college counseling, students are often poorly screened for academic programs and educational institutions. Students lack adequate time management skills and poor adaptation skills for college life, as well as a lack of occupational exploration and selection or a lack of financial aid to attend college. Many of our schools, including Wilson have to choose between counselors or teachers due to budget constraints or require counselors to assist in clerical tasks because of staffing shortages. Without counselors we lack the adequate time to give students individual attention and guidance in informing students of post secondary education opportunities best suited for their potential and talents. However, through increased support for guidance counseling, we will better assist students and gain better graduation results. Trained counselors will help students better

access and enroll in eligible public and private universities and colleges which have a proven track record for success with low income and first generation college bound students from urban schools. Improved pre-college guidance counseling for parents and students from professional counselors supported by DC Cap and Gear-Up will impede the negative statistics of low graduation rates especially for students who are typically underserved.

**Increases in College Tuition Costs**

According to data collected from the College Board, tuition costs are rising nationally. Now more than ever with the increase of tuition costs, many of the District's youth will be restricted from pursuing a college degree without the assistance of DCTAG funding. As a result of your reauthorization of DCTAG, DCPS students will continued to enjoy equitable access to college along with the long term investments in the District of Columbia and our nation. College education benefits not only the individual student, but also society as a whole.

**Wilson Senior High School College Initiatives**

Currently Wilson enrolls District of Columbia students from almost every ward of the city and also from various countries throughout the world. Nearly 80% of Wilson's students today are Black and Hispanic and first generation college bound. A large percentage of our students are also eligible for free and reduced lunch. The DC Tuition Assistance Grants and other financial aid are typically used by the majority of our students because many have no "expected family contribution" when financial aid calculations are done and are also expected to contribute financially to help the support their families. These students, as with many of our middle-income families, will continue to need the support of the DCTAG program to help offset their college expenses. For many of our students the thought of paying

for college over the next four to six years can be daunting which discourages many from even applying. However, DC youth deserve equal access to excellent higher education options as their peers in the other states DCTAG has made college more attainable and provide opportunities to students who otherwise would not have the means to pay for post-secondary education.

As Chair of the Guidance Department at Woodrow Wilson Senior High School in the District of Columbia, we have been instrumental in helping DC students graduate from high school and achieving their dreams of a college education. During my tenure, we have increased our student enrollment in universities and colleges in more than 45 states across the country and the District of Columbia. With DCTAG funding, 301 students from the class of 2006 matriculated to 171 schools in 41 states, Canada and the Czech Republic. Similarly, 236 students headed off to various colleges and universities in 2005. We believe the significant increase of college placements from 114 students in 2002 to 301 students in 2006 is a direct result of tuition assistance grant funding coupled with high-quality guidance counseling which informed students of educational opportunities for DCPS high school graduates. This “good news” should be considered by the Subcommittee to support the reauthorization of H.R. 1124.

**Project Push**

Four years ago at Wilson, we instituted Project Push, which is designed to educate students and their families about post secondary education. This initiative helps students and their families successfully map out a four-year plan to navigate through high school, take more rigorous high school courses, as well as preparing students for a smooth transition to post-secondary college and or career plans.

**Increased Advanced Placements Classes**

One of our most notable accomplishments over the past five years include an increase in students taking some seven to eight hundred Advanced Placement (AP) exams. We also increased the diversity of students taking the AP classes and exams to more closely reflect Wilson's student population. According to the College Board, accelerated high school program of study with AP courses increases college acceptances and college graduation rates. In the same way, Wilson has witnessed an increase in acceptances and scholarships from colleges, universities and trade schools.

**Improved Post Secondary Access**

Improved access to higher education opportunities with increases in financial aid packages and support from DCTAG, the District of Columbia College Access Program (DC-CAP) and the DC Leveraging Educational Assistance Partnership (DC-LEAP) has helped us to conquer the following:

- Sending nearly 88% of Wilson's students to colleges, and trade schools.
- Financial assistance provided for students to pursue post-secondary with the assistance of the DCTAG and other financial aid packages.
- Increased our first generation college bound students attendance rate.
- Creating a college handbook to facilitate on going support and guidance.
- Increased guidance for ninth graders of the four-year high school plan in navigating there way through a more rigorous course plan and ensuring college success.
- Hosting two large college forums annually for students, parents, and other community college access programs to ensure the ongoing education and support necessary to pursue post secondary education.

- Continued collaboration with Wilson's educational leaders to continually enhance instruction to ensure the literacy skills and academic skills of our graduates will assure each of college graduation.
- Assisting students to apply for financial aid and acquiring millions of dollars of grants, financial aid, and scholarships for Wilson's seniors.
- Maintaining ongoing collaboration with public universities and colleges.

**Student Achievements**

Clearly, DCTAG has had many successes. Since my tenure at Wilson, I will witness my second college graduation of students using the funds from DCTAG. For many of those students DCTAG directly influenced their post-secondary plans. I am proud to say that I had the privilege of working with a former student of mine from Coolidge last year teaching music at Wilson. What a living testimony he is. There are many more just like him, many of them are here with me today willing to share their stories of DCTAG support and to personally influence each of you to reauthorize H.R. 1224. Many of them returned to the District of Columbia to give back to their communities; some are teachers; others are working in DC and the metropolitan area, while others have chosen to return to our local consortium of college and universities to study medicine, law, and other forms of higher education.

Many parents and students asked me to share their concerns about the impact that H.R. 1124 would have on the District youth's quest for higher education goals if the DCTAG program is not reauthorized. Let me share a few of their stories: Sherene attends the University of Michigan, graduates in May and has already been accepted to two of DC's top law schools. Brian a first generation Chinese student needed DCTAG to go away to college, giving his three siblings and parents great joy to not only see their child

go to college, but also improved his family's quality of life by freeing more space in their small two bedroom apartment. Dwayne, a victim of gun violence in his junior year of high school would not have been able to break the cycle of violence without DCTAG and have the opportunity to go to college in a new geographical location to return home older and wiser. Lastly, my son Leonard, with DC financial assistance was able to go to school and receive an undergraduate degree and a master's degree and will now complete his law degree from Catholic University in May. He returned come back to DC energized and he is committing his time and talents to help students in DC by running for the DC Board of Education in the May 2007 elections.

Again, thank you Mr. Chairman, for this opportunity to testify today before the committee. I am committed to working with you and the committee to ensure this bill is reauthorized so that it can continue to improve the educational opportunities available to the DCPS high school graduates. I would be happy to answer any question at this time.

Mr. DAVIS OF ILLINOIS. Thank you so much, Dr. Bennett. Of course, yours is a living testimony. I heard you indicate that many of the young people look up to you, and I guess if I had a counselor with a law degree I would look up to her, also. I always have good things to say about teachers, but I say that counselors are the salt of the Earth. They are pillars of the university, partly because both my wife and I worked as school counselors and I have to keep saying that. But thank you so very much for your testimony. We really appreciate it.

We have been joined by Representative Lynch and Delegate Norton, and I would pause at this moment in the proceedings to ask if either one of them or both would have some comments they would like to make at this point.

Mr. LYNCH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Very, very briefly, I just wanted to thank you for your willingness to hold this important hearing.

I think that, much like what is going on over in the Capitol today on the subject of the D.C. Voting Rights, this is really an issue that speaks directly to the fullness of citizenship, and I certainly want to register my support for the D.C. TAG program. I also want to speak in favor of the increase from \$33 million to \$35.1 million in fiscal year 2008 that has been requested.

I want to thank all the panelists that came here today. Unfortunately, we schedule everything at the same time, so I am late in attending, but, as Ms. Holmes Norton will attest to, we have been very busy today. Having registered my support for this measure and for D.C. voting rights, in general, I think I will yield my time to the busiest woman in Washington, DC, this morning, Ms. Holmes Norton.

[The prepared statement of Hon. Stephen F. Lynch follows:]

**REP. STEPHEN F. LYNCH**

Subcommittee on Federal Workforce, Postal Service, and the District of Columbia  
“*Impact of the D.C. College Tuition Assistance Program on Higher Education in D.C.*”  
March 22, 2007

Opening Statement

---

**THANK YOU, CHAIRMAN DAVIS, FOR HOLDING  
TODAY’S HEARING. I’D ALSO LIKE TO WELCOME  
MAYOR FENTY AND OUR ADDITIONAL PANELISTS FOR  
HELPING THIS SUBCOMMITTEE WITH ITS WORK.**

**MR. CHAIRMAN, I’D JUST LIKE TO EXPRESS MY  
SUPPORT FOR THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA TUITION  
ASSISTANCE PROGRAM – WHICH PROVIDES MUCH-  
NEEDED SCHOLARSHIPS TO D.C. RESIDENTS FOR  
THEIR UNDERGRADUATION EDUCATION.  
SPECIFICALLY, DC-TAG PERMITS D.C. HIGH SCHOOL  
GRADUATES TO ATTEND COLLEGES AND  
UNIVERSITIES IN ALL 50 STATES THROUGH  
SCHOLARSHIPS THAT COVER THE DIFFERENCE**

**BETWEEN IN-STATE AND OUT-OF-STATE TUITION – UP TO \$10,000 PER STUDENT PER SCHOOL YEAR.**

**REGRETTABLY, THIS ESSENTIAL PROGRAM WILL EXPIRE ON SEPTEMBER 30, 2007 UNLESS REAUTHORIZED BY CONGRESS. ACCORDINGLY, I'D LIKE TO THANK CHAIRMAN DAVIS, MS. NORTON, AND THE RANKING MEMBER OF OUR FULL COMMITTEE, MR. DAVIS – FOR THEIR GOOD WORK ON H.R. 1124 – LEGISLATION TO EXTEND DC-TAG.**

**I'D ALSO LIKE TO EXPRESS MY SUPPORT FOR THE DISTRICT'S REQUEST FOR INCREASED FUNDING FOR DC-TAG – FROM \$33 MILLION FOR FY2007 TO \$35.1 MILLION IN FY2008. AND I KNOW THAT MAYOR FENTY WILL BE INSTRUMENTAL IN THIS EFFORT.**

58

**THANK YOU MR. CHAIRMAN – I YIELD THE BALANCE  
OF MY TIME.**

Ms. NORTON. I thank my colleague for coming, because I know what constraints we are up against, and let's think about the next bill up is, the Iraq supplemental.

I want to offer my apologies to the Chair, even as I thank him for making this the first hearing of our subcommittee on this issue. The reason that we wanted this to be the first hearing is I think probably been clear from the testimony that has been offered.

I certainly want to apologize to all of our witnesses. I particularly wanted to hear the witnesses who have benefited from this bill and regret very much that those that helped them benefit and those who have taken advantage of this bill had to testify before I came.

I know that perhaps the chairman told you that there was just a little mishap on the way to the vote, and Tom Davis and I were called upon to explain to the gathered press, who would not understand what in the world had happened, and whether the voting rights for the District of Columbia was dead for good. I just want to say that for sure it is not. It is a delay. You now know what the Congress is all about—it is all about strategy. It is seldom about the kind of substance that this bill involves. The chairman, himself, is a cosponsor of the bill.

You will not hear the games being played about this bill. This bill has been thoroughly bipartisan in both houses, haven't had the slightest problem getting it through, don't imagine that I will. I think the major reason is that there was a clear understanding that among the many ways the District residents are disadvantaged is the absence of a State university system. It has been an incentive to move out of the city, particularly as college costs have risen, and right across the line are two States with State university systems containing upwards of 30 colleges each to choose from.

Worse, we know that not having a full State university system—you can't expect the city to have that—being grateful for our State university, but not having the full range has meant apparently that large numbers of residents didn't go to college at all. How else do you explain the 60 percent or so increase in just 5 years in D.C. residents attending college? A full range, but perhaps, above all, the full tuition. The \$10,000 is the cost of tuition at most State colleges has spectacularly escalated college attendance in the District of Columbia.

One thing is sure in this town: if it was a white collar town when I was a kid growing up here, it is perhaps the part of the United States now that most requires a college education. Never did have a blue collar sector. The closest we have to it is our tourist sector. To earn a decent living it is clear that you are going to need some college, and thus the Congress looked at that, and it looked at that when the District was, itself, not doing nearly so well as a city as it has been during the last 10 years or so. It decided to put its money on education.

The investment has paid dividends to the Federal Government, as well as to the city. I heard some of the testimony that talked about young people coming back. There is every reason to come back when the city has given you these opportunities.

We are going to move this bill forward as soon as we can, Mr. Chairman. I hope that chairman of the full committee will move it on suspension, because it has had such broad support. If not, we

will simply put it to a vote and hope that there is not a motion to recommit that tries to kill this one.

Our voting rights bill is not dead. It could be back today. The only reason I think it won't be is because we have 6 hours of debate on the Iraq supplemental. It will be back very soon. Meanwhile, it has been a real pleasure to come to a hearing where the bipartisan accolades about the bill have been ongoing and have been heard in the city and where Congress has received those accolades by continuing to support the bill, this time with reauthorization.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. DAVIS OF ILLINOIS. Thank you very much, Delegate Norton.

I want to thank our witnesses for your indulgence. We will now return and hear from Ms. Boone.

#### STATEMENT OF ALICE BOONE

Ms. BOONE. Chairman Davis, Subcommittee on the Federal Workforce, Postal Service, and the District of Columbia, I am honored and I thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

From a parent's perspective, authorization of the D.C. TAG program will greatly benefit D.C. college-bound students with limited resources for obtaining post-secondary education, as it has greatly benefited my daughter, who was awarded her first grant in 2004, and she is completing her sophomore year this May.

I personally value the D.C. TAG program whereby I have been also able to maintain my household's cost of living expenses independent from additional State support, and have been able to provide her siblings with also a quality education for post-secondary attainment.

Moreover, the D.C. TAG program is enabling my daughter to complete a second milestone in her educational endeavors, which, in turn, will afford her advantages of home ownership after college graduation, no Federal student aid debt. At an early age she will be able to take advantage of lower mortgage interest rates and, based on a low debt ratio percentage her rise to become a contributor to this economy will be soon and at an early age.

As a parent's perspective, extension of the D.C. TAG program would also benchmark a name for itself and D.C. nationally. College-bound students who complete post-secondary education but elect to establish residency outside of the District of Columbia can acknowledge and contribute their success to the College Access Act, which opened doors that otherwise would not have been available to them.

Home ownership is being strongly encouraged as a national effort, and college graduates with low Federal student loans meeting qualifications for low-interest mortgage loans will contribute to any economy that this country values.

Last, from a D.C. homeowner's perspective, I feel strongly that the minority participation with the dynamics of this city will greatly increase subsequent to the extension and authorization of the D.C. TAG program. Low to moderate-income family seeking suitable residence to raise a family can take pride and would strive harder toward home ownership with attractive amenities such as

the Public Education Reform Act Amendment of 2007 coupled with the D.C. TAG program.

Securing children with quality home life and hopes and dreams of a college education helps communities grow.

Mr. Chairman and the subcommittee, I thank you again for providing me with an opportunity to express my views on this important topic. I would be happy to take any questions.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Boone follows:]

H.R. 1124: "TO EXTEND THE DISTRICT COLUMBIA COLLEGE ACCESS ACT OF 1999"

Before

The Committee on Oversight and Government Reform  
Subcommittee on the Federal Workforce, Postal Service and the District of Columbia

The Honorable Danny K. Davis, Chairman

Testimony of Alice M. Boone

Thursday, March 22, 2007

Chairman Davis, thank you for the opportunity to testify before the Subcommittee today.

Extension of the above H.R. 1124, would greatly benefit DC college-bound students, with limited resources for attaining postsecondary education, as it has greatly benefited my daughter, who was awarded her first grant in 2004. I have been able to maintain my cost of living expenses independent of Federal or state support, and provide her siblings with a quality education for postsecondary attainment. Moreover, H.R. 1124 is enabling my daughter to complete a second milestone in her educational endeavors, which in turn will afford her advantages of homeownership after college graduation with low federal student loan debt. At an early age, she will be able to take advantage of lower interest mortgage loans, based on a lower debt-ratio percentage, and rise to become a contributor to the economy of this city.

Extension of the H.R. 1124, will also benchmark a name for itself nationally. College-bound students who complete postsecondary education, but elect to establish residency outside of the DC metropolitan area, can acknowledge and contribute their success to the College Access Act, which will open doors, that otherwise would not be available to them. Homeownership is being strongly encouraged as a national effort, and college graduates with low federal student loan debt, meeting the qualifications for low interest mortgage loans, will contribute to an economy that this country values.

Lastly, I feel strongly that minority participation in the dynamics of this city would increase subsequent to the extension of the H.R. 1124. Low to moderate income families seeking suitable residence to raise a family, can take pride and would strive harder toward homeownership with attractive amenities such as, "The New District of Columbia Public Education Reform Amendment Act of 2007", coupled with the extension of H.R. 1124. Securing children with quality home life and hopes and dreams of a college education helps communities grow.

Mr. Chairman, thank you again for providing me an opportunity to express my views on this very important topic.

Mr. DAVIS OF ILLINOIS. Thank you very much, Ms. Boone. Thank you. We will get to the questions in a minute.

I would like to go to Ms. Chappin, and then I would like to defer to the ranking member of our full committee, who has joined us, but we will finish up with Ms. Chappin and then we will proceed with questions and comments from our ranking member.

#### STATEMENT OF RANDA CHAPPIN

Ms. CHAPPIN. Good afternoon. My name is Randa Chappin, and I am here to express that I simply support the efforts of the D.C. TAG program and the D.C. College Access Act, because it has enabled me to become the person that I am today.

As a sophomore in high school, college was not considered an institution of higher learning for me; it was an institution for debt creation. I did not have the funds to consider even going for the first semester, let alone 4 consecutive years. Something had to give, and it did. D.C. TAG was presented to me as an opportunity to help manage the financial obstacles I was facing at the time. The grants were a tremendous blessing to me and allowed me to focus on my studies instead of waiting in line in the financial aid office for a resolution that would not come without interest.

Today I am proud to shout that I am a graduate of American University. I continue to utilize my degree in communications and urban development to the fullest while running a tutor mentor program at Shaw Junior High School, the most under-funded public school in the District. I also speak out around the metropolitan area to teens about college and other real-life issues. I mentor three teens personally, one of whom just received a full scholarship to a top 10 university, and another teen that recently placed first in her class in terms of academics.

Without programs such as D.C. TAG I would not have such a strong passion to help others and to make a difference in the few lives God has allowed me to touch.

I am continuing to work and reside in the District, and I feel that this will always be my home.

Allow me to begin and provide you some perspective of the mental state I had when approaching the idea of higher learning. With the grades that I had ranging from average to above average, coupled with the lack of advanced learning opportunities, I did not expect to go to college and explore to attain greatness. I expected mediocrity, and all the while I knew better. I knew what heights I could reach and how the burden of how I would get there would always cloud my thought process.

It is truly amazing how expensive a college education is becoming. It causes one to return to the never-changing focus of the haves and the have-nots. I consider myself to be richly blessed and, while I needed that extra push that D.C. TAG provided, I am more so concerned and saddened by the thought of those who have more dire conditions to deal with.

Why should the burden and cost of financing college be affixed to the unsuspecting student? It is my personal opinion that is not fair. No one is keeping the public and private institutions of higher education from trading a degree for what seems like an endless supply of debt.

The D.C. TAG program afforded me the opportunity to focus on my studies. It may be a mere \$1,000 to some students, but for the students like myself who are restricted from their classes, sent to the hell that is the registrar's office, the financial aid office, and the student accounts office, for those students who don't have the parental cushion of their counterparts, for those young parents such as myself, and those other young adults, D.C. TAG offered a financial stress-free resolution like no other. D.C. TAG's friendly and cooperative personnel furthered my newly optimistic outlook on the plausibility of a higher education. The facts, as I saw them, were that college costs equate in monetary range from a low-end three-bedroom house to a new condominium downtown.

Also, most of today's students and their parents are first pointed out to high-interest loans as a financial aid resolution, and if you are a young parent, as I am, you have no chance of going and graduating from college. This is the state of mind of young people in this area that I know firsthand about, that I have cried with them, and I have gone through the obstacles that they have faced, speaking at the different seminars and what not.

I won't take any more of your time to further explain what is already seen; however, please be mindful when you are making your decision that the lives that you affect today are the lives that will be running your corporations, your government, and other entities tomorrow.

I took my grant and I finished college at American University and my life is spent working on somebody else's behalf in order to move them further along in their life. This is what I do with my time. You have an opportunity to continue the change that has already been set forth in 1999, and I hope you will take it.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Chappin follows:]

H.R. 1124: "TO EXTEND THE DISTRICT COLUMBIA COLLEGE ACCESS ACT OF  
1999"

Committee on Oversight and Government Reform  
Subcommittee on the Federal Workforce, Postal Service and the District of  
Columbia

The Honorable Danny K. Davis, Chairman

**Testimony of Randa Chappin**

Thursday, March 22, 2007

Allow me to begin by providing some perspective to the mental state I had when approached with the idea of higher learning. With grades that ranged from average to above average, coupled with the lack of advanced learning opportunities, I did not expect to go to college to explore and attain greatness. I expected mediocrity, all the while I knew better. I knew what heights I could reach, however the burden of how will I get there would always cloud my thought process. It is truly amazing how expensive a college education is becoming. It causes one to return to the never changing focus of the 'haves' and the 'have nots'. I consider myself to be richly blessed, and while I needed the extra push that DC Tag provided, I am more so concerned and saddened by the thought of those who have more dire conditions to deal with.

Why should the burden and costs of financing college be affixed to the unsuspecting student? It's not fair! There is no one keeping the public and private institutions of higher education from trading a degree for what seems like an endless supply of debt. Could the public school system provide a better vested opportunity for its students before graduating them? Of course. However that is neither here nor there. The question at hand is why you should allow the financial contributions to continue.

The DC Tag program afforded me the opportunity to focus on my studies rather than my finances, and that has made all the difference in my life. It may be a mere thousand dollars to you, however for the students like myself who were restricted from their classes until debts were paid, for the students who live through the triangle of hell that is the registrar's office, the financial aid office, and the student accounts' office, for the students who don't have the parental cushion of their counterparts, for those young adults DC Tag offered a financial stress-free resolution like no other.

DC Tag's friendly and cooperative personnel furthered my newly optimistic outlook on the plausibility of a higher education. Here are the facts, as college students and their parents view them:

- 1) College costs equate in monetary range from a low-end three bedroom house to a new condominium downtown.
- 2) Most of today's students, and their parents, are first pointed to high interest loans as financial aid.
- 3) If you are an young parent, you have no chance of going, AND graduating from college.

This is the state of mind of the young people in this area. I know first hand knowledge of the trials, tears, and obstacles teens are facing. I am an active speaker at college seminars, conferences, and in my community in general. I have spoken with the media at length regarding this topic and its repercussions on America's Youth, and with such, I feel that I am well informed to be able to speak to you ladies and gentlemen with anecdotal authority regarding the necessity of financial aid, specifically the DC Tag program.

I find it demeaning that the fine men and women, personnel, officiators, parents, students and the like must come and plead for continuing a reputable program whose main purpose is to assist those students in Washington DC with opportunities for college. I am willing to do so, however it does not take much to realize that the students of DCPS need all the help they can get. If you walked through any school HS in Washington DC to see its decrepit existence, you'd know. If you looked through the records of scores of children merely passing basic curriculum with a satisfactory grade or lower, you'd know. If you saw the lines of students, turned away from their classes, locked out of their dorm rooms, working two or three jobs to pay the costs of books alone, you'd know.

So I won't take any more of your time to further explain what is already seen. However, please be mindful when making your decision, that the lives you affect today are the lives that will be running the corporations, government, and other entities on tomorrow. I took my grant and finished college at American University with a Bachelor's Degree in Communication and Urban Development. My life is spent working on someone else's behalf in order for them to move further along in life. That is what I do with my time.

You have an opportunity to make change. Make the right change.

Mr. DAVIS OF ILLINOIS. Thank you very much. I want to thank all of our witnesses.

As I indicated, we have now been joined by a primary sponsor of this legislation and the ranking member of our full committee, Representative Tom Davis. I would defer to him for any comments that he might have at this time.

Mr. DAVIS OF VIRGINIA. Mr. Chairman, thank you very much. Let me thank our witnesses for being here, as well.

In a little-noticed rule change, one of my last acts as chairman of the full committee, I added a provision that any chairman of a subcommittee bearing the title District of Columbia would have to be led by a member named Davis. While this gives both parties the widest possible discretion, I am pleased that you, Chairman Davis, have been so named. [Laughter.]

Mr. DAVIS OF ILLINOIS. Thank you.

Mr. DAVIS OF VIRGINIA. Thus we have the nomenclature continuity here in our Nation's Capital.

We have traveled a long road since the Access Act, from March 1, 1999, when it was introduced until the present day. The road took us through the predecessor subcommittee that I chaired at the time to the full Government Reform Committee, to the House and Senate floor, and then the White House where President Clinton signed the measure November 12, 1999.

In all of its legislative approvals, the College Access Act, now known as the Tuition Assistance Grant Program, was passed unanimously by voice vote. President Clinton had included sufficient money in his budget submission that year and a statement of administration policy endorsed the approach we had taken to authorize the use of those funds.

I am very proud of our hard bipartisan effort in enacting this measure and its reauthorization 2 years ago.

My thanks to Ms. Norton, who was the ranking member in 1999, who has worked tirelessly to enhance the legislation ever since.

I also want to thank my then-counterpart in the Senate, George Voinovich, for his continuing support, and Senators Warner and Durbin for working with us to improve this legislation.

The 5-year reauthorization legislation before us today will enable District residents to continue to attend colleges and universities at in-State rates. President Bush, in his budget submission for fiscal year 2008, has included sufficient funds to make this happen. Then-Mayor Tony Williams and now D.C. Mayor Adrian Fenty have both strongly supported this law as being very important for the District's high school graduates.

As documented to this subcommittee, the graduation rate for public school students in the city has doubled since this law went into effect, and we are now incentivizing people to stay in school and to go to school afterwards. It was just a generation ago where some D.C. high schools sent more kids to Lorton Reformatory than to college. We changed that. We changed it a kid at a time, and this act has played a very important role.

This is a classic leveling of the playing field. No city or county in the country is required to supplement its in-State rate with local funds, and neither should the taxpayer in the Nation's Capital be

saddled with the burden. Neither should the city be penalized for its own success in administering this program.

Back on March 4, 1999, when I introduced this bill, I went to nearby Eastern High School with Ms. Norton. I was deeply moved by the reaction of the students. I will never forget how many kids took our hands, looked us in our eyes, and thanked us for introducing the original bill. I am proud of what we have been able to do in the capital city since 1995 when the city was literally bankrupt. Economic development, public safety, the real estate market, and so many other aspects of city life have changed for the better, but nothing has given me more satisfaction than working to improve educational opportunities. Fighting for equal education opportunity is one of the reasons I think most of us entered public life.

You need a healthy city to have a healthy region. Reauthorizing this law which has expanded higher educational choices is an enormous step forward, and it is a strong part of our vision for the future.

Again, I just want to thank our witnesses for coming and sharing with us your stories today.

Mr. DAVIS OF ILLINOIS. Thank you very much, Representative Davis.

Now I would like to go to Representative Sarbanes to see if he has any questions of this panel.

Mr. SARBANES. I don't have a question. I just did want to react to Mr. O'Leary's initial testimony, though, in terms of presenting. We talk obviously in terms of what it means to the young people to have this opportunity, advantage, but it is as equally important for the families, because it represents whether the promise of the American dream is real or illusionary to them.

I had the opportunity about 6 months ago to speak with a woman at one of the MARC train stations in Maryland who was on her way to her job in the District of Columbia. She wanted to talk to me about the cost of higher education, and she looked me in the eye at one point and she said, without any sort of bitterness or recrimination, she said, I did everything they told me I was supposed to do. She said, my husband and I worked three jobs between us, we saved our money, and we told our children that if you work hard and you study you can make it. Now we can't afford to send our three children to college.

In that moment I think she was expressing the frustration of an increasing number of families in this country, which is we thought that if you played by the rules and you worked hard you could make it here. Then they find out that there is something, they just can't get there. They can't get across because usually it is the financial aspect of it.

So this program is obviously critical in helping to bridge that, and the testimony that all of you provided I think simply reinforced that notion in terms of opportunity.

I said it already twice, Mr. Chairman, but I will say it again: I think that this program in many ways can model the way we approach and enhance opportunities for higher education across the whole country. The concepts that are in place here don't have to be restricted to the District of Columbia. Although obviously the District of Columbia has a special claim on this kind of a program

because of its unusual circumstances, the concepts here are more widely applicable.

Thank you for your testimony.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. DAVIS OF ILLINOIS. Thank you very much, Representative Sarbanes.

I will go over to Representative Davis and see if he has any questions.

Mr. DAVIS OF VIRGINIA. Ms. Chappin, let me start with you. You are a graduate of the program. You understand it. If you look at your classmates taking advantage of this, without this do you think a lot of them would have been discouraged from even applying to college and going forward because the costs were just out of reach?

Ms. CHAPPIN. Absolutely. There is no question whatsoever. The amount of scholarships that are out in even our local colleges right now are diminishing, and a lot of them are academic, and a lot of us just have average grades, so the grants that didn't hold you to 4.0 all 4 years or the grants where you didn't have to be almost destitute in order to be able to go to college, these programs, they give you that financial push that you need, and they also give you the counseling, that reciprocity that you need between being a high school student and an adult, just saying that these are your options and lay them out on the table. So absolutely, all of them would certainly be able to go forth and even view college as an option. Five years ago I can't say the same.

Mr. DAVIS OF VIRGINIA. I think out in our area it has opened it up to some of our historically black colleges in Virginia—Virginia State, Virginia Union—others, as well as our community colleges out there in northern Virginia where you just get a more complete college choice instead of what you were offered before at this stage. The facts speak for themselves, the number of kids that are seeing their way through to graduate from high school and then the numbers that are going on to higher education. Ultimately, if you want to change the city you have to give the young people the opportunity. Hopefully this is working and this continued reauthorization will continue.

I appreciate everybody sharing their perspectives here. This should be one D.C. bill that goes through unscathed as we move through the process, but even in the past we have had problems with people putting holds on them in the other body and the like, and so it is important that we build the record here.

Thank you very much.

Mr. DAVIS OF ILLINOIS. Thank you, Representative Davis.

I now go to Ms. Norton and see if she's got any questions.

Ms. NORTON. As it turned out I did get to hear two of you testify. I apologize that I was not here for the first testimony.

Of course, it is hard for me to think of a bill that has been more important to the District of Columbia than this bill. All you have to do is go talk to your constituents and say D.C. TAG and everybody rises and applauds before you get "TAG" out of your mouth. I compare it only to the home buyer's tax credit. One kept people in the city, kept people from moving out, and the other says if you are going to live here you had better be educated, and I will be

darned if D.C. residents didn't take the cue and come forward in huge numbers.

I would just like to ask, Ms. Chappin, I don't know when I have been more impressed than I have just by your testimony, the way you presented it and the way you have answered questions. I mean, you are a walking example that I think says it all, and somehow we ought to record you and let you speak for the bill.

Ms. CHAPPIN. Thank you.

Ms. NORTON. I would like to know a little bit more about yourself, because I read your testimony, heard your testimony. The candor of your testimony, the sincerity of your testimony is striking. You didn't say where you went to high school.

Ms. CHAPPIN. I am sorry. I went to Woodrow Wilson Senior High School.

Ms. NORTON. You did go to Wilson.

Ms. CHAPPIN. Yes. I stayed all in the Northwest, that corridor. I went to Horace Mann Elementary School, which is off of New Mexico Avenue in Northwest. I went to Alice Deal Junior High School, which is off of—I don't remember the name of the street. And then I ended up at Woodrow Wilson, graduated a year early. I was able to go to Howard University for a year, and then I transferred to American University to finish my studies because Howard didn't have the focus that I was looking for, because I know communications is a strong point of mine and I love to talk, but the urban development aspect—

Ms. NORTON. I will say communications is a strong point of yours.

Ms. CHAPPIN. The urban development aspect. And one thing I just wanted to share with you, I find a lot of students, even in the D.C. area if you open it up to Maryland and Virginia, they feel that we are told that, get a good education, get a good education, education is the key, that is what you have to do, but then we are not given the resources that we need to get a good education.

Even when I was in high school at Woodrow Wilson and I was placed in remedial classes because the AP classes I tested into were full, and paperwork, they didn't realize that until November into the school year, so I was placed into a remedial class. By the time I got to college I had to catch up tremendously, and I thought I was doing well. I got an A in remedial math. Well, of course, who can't get an A in remedial math? I am sorry.

All I am saying is that we are told so much, and it is drilled into us that education is where we have to go with it, and it is so much talk and it is not enough action. We find that we are not supported in aspects of just getting a good education. We find that we are not supported in remaining in D.C. Our school system needs improvement, and it is kind of like how do you start when you are already two steps behind.

So programs such as this kind of made up for the difference and kind of put you at the same ground level, and it was your choice to either move forward or stay where you were.

I am happy that a lot of our participants in the D.C. TAG program and the D.C. CAP program, D.C. LEAP recipients, all of those participants are those that have the passion to move forward and not stay stagnant.

Ms. NORTON. You went to two private colleges in the District, both of them private, meaning you got a grant that was not as high as a public grant. This is the way many States do it. If you go to a private college you get considerably less than going to the State university. So that meant you had to put your college access grant together with other funds. How did you find other funds? What kind of funds are available for someone like you who wants to go to a private college and does not want to take advantage of the \$10,000 grant?

Ms. CHAPPIN. Well, in order to make it to the private college I held down three jobs the whole duration of my college career. I also obtained other scholarships from other private organizations and I honestly just wrote letters to almost everybody that I could think of saying hey, I would like to finish school, can you help me out. I was able to obtain scholarships from all of those other organizations. And there is also the Pell Grant. That is also very appreciated.

Ms. NORTON. The cobbling together of funds that virtually every student does today, one way or the other—some may qualify for some and not others—makes college education possible for everybody. Of course, if you live in a city that doesn't have a State university system it becomes more difficult, which is the reason for TAG.

You indicated that you were employed at the Heart Rhythm Society.

Ms. CHAPPIN. Yes.

Ms. NORTON. Where is that located?

Ms. CHAPPIN. That is located at 14th and K in Washington, DC, mere blocks from the White House, I believe.

Ms. NORTON. What do you do for the Heart Rhythm Society?

Ms. CHAPPIN. I am the executive assistant to the vice president of communications and marketing. The organization basically holds a lot of scientific sessions, and they are a group of professionals geared toward increasing information, advocacy, and just overall aspects of those professionals who work in cardiac rhythm issues, so whether that is sudden cardiac arrest, ICDs, all of those great things.

Ms. NORTON. Did you have any difficulty finding employment once you graduated? How long were you unemployed?

Ms. CHAPPIN. I was unemployed—

Ms. NORTON. Well, when did you graduate?

Ms. CHAPPIN. I graduated in May 2005, and I was unemployed for probably, I want to say about 14 hours after I received my degree.

Ms. NORTON. How come? How were you able to get a job so quickly?

Ms. CHAPPIN. Pounding pavement.

Ms. NORTON. It doesn't look like you pounded much pavement.

Ms. CHAPPIN. Well, I was already looking. The only reason I graduated in 2005 and 2004 was because of a missed class, so I was already sending out resumes and what-not with the understanding that I was going to graduate in the winter of 2004. Came to light, had to take that last class, and I had offers available to

me, and I graduated Mother's Day on 2005 and I began work that Monday.

Ms. NORTON. So, notwithstanding the considerably higher unemployment rate among District residents, you did not have any difficulty finding employment once you had your college degree?

Ms. CHAPPIN. None whatsoever.

Ms. NORTON. You went through in 4 years without stopping?

Ms. CHAPPIN. Not at all.

Ms. NORTON. Well, Mr. Chairman, again, I appreciate that you have reached out to find a student who could speak for herself about the value of TAG, because I think she has said it all.

Thank you. I yield.

Mr. DAVIS OF ILLINOIS. Well, thank you very much, Ms. Norton.

We want to thank all of our witnesses, those who are still here and those who testified earlier. I think that you make a compelling case, as well as demonstrate a tremendous amount of interest in higher education. I know that all members of this subcommittee appreciate your coming and spending time and sharing not only your experiences but also your thoughts with us.

All of this is very timely because, as you can see, we are about to have a vote, and so it is an excellent time.

I also want to thank our staff for pulling together the hearing. Again, we thank you all for coming.

This hearing is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 3:45 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

[The prepared statement of Hon. Elijah E. Cummings follows:]

U.S. House of Representatives  
110<sup>th</sup> Congress

Opening Statement

Representative Elijah E. Cummings, D-Maryland

“Impact of the District of Columbia College Tuition Assistance Program on Higher Education in D.C.”

Subcommittee on Federal Workforce, Postal Service and the District of Columbia  
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform

March 22, 2007

Mr. Chairman,

Thank you for holding this important hearing to examine the impact that the District of Columbia College Tuition Assistance Program has had on expanding the educational opportunities for high school students in the District.

One of the unique problems facing District of Columbia residents is the fact that there is no state university system located here.

Recognizing the limitations this has placed on the District’s young people, Congress in 1999 passed the District of Columbia College Access Act, which authorizes the federal government to provide tuition scholarships to District high school graduates to attend colleges and universities in other states at in-state tuition rates.

The District of Columbia College Tuition Assistance Program, or DC TAG, covers the difference between in-state and out-of-state tuition rates, up to \$10,000 per year, with a maximum of \$50,000 per student.

It also provides \$2,500 in tuition assistance to District high school graduates who attend private colleges and universities in neighboring counties, and \$2,500 to graduates who attend Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs).

This program has made a real difference for students from the District of Columbia. It has grown from an original pool of 2,997 students receiving support in 2001 to a projected 5,349 in 2006.

1,087 of these students will be attending school in my home state of Maryland.

College enrollment of District of Columbia Public School graduates has doubled since DC TAG was launched.

This highly effective program has placed college counselors in every public high school in the District to educate students on the options available to them after graduation.

Counselors guide students through the college application and financial assistance processes. They provide educational workshops and seminars for parents, and they help high school students for up to five years after graduation with mentoring, academics and on campus visits by retention staff.

This last part is critical: DC TAG not only makes sure students get to college, it makes sure they are successful once they get there.

I am a strong supporter of the highly successful DC TAG program, and I am glad for the opportunity today to learn more about how we can strengthen it through passage of H.R. 1124, "To extend the District of Columbia Access Act of 1999."

I want to welcome the Honorable Mayor Adrian Fenty, and all of our panelists, who have come to discuss this program with us here today.

You picked a good day to come, as we spent the day debating the need for full voting rights for the District of Columbia on the floor of the House.

I look forward to the testimony of today's witnesses and yield back the balance of my time.