



The Roman Catholic  
Archdiocese of Washington



United States  
Conference of  
Catholic Bishops

June 25, 2025

The Honorable Dave Joyce  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Financial Services  
and General Government  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Steny Hoyer  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Financial Services  
and General Government  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Joyce and Ranking Member Hoyer,

The Fiscal Year 2026 (FY26) Budget recently proposed by President Trump contains a funding request of \$52.5 million for the Scholarships for Opportunity and Results (SOAR) Act<sup>1</sup> – which includes the popular D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program (OSP) – with no sunset language or restrictions that would preclude schools from participating in OSP. This is an acknowledgment of the importance of the SOAR Act and the imperative of continuing OSP parental choice.

While we appreciate the continued funding for OSP (and all of SOAR), it is critical to fund SOAR at the *fully authorized level* of \$60 million, rather than continuing to underfund this initiative at \$52.5 million, as it has been for too many years. **Accordingly, on behalf of the many families across the District of Columbia who benefit immensely from OSP, we are writing to request that you increase the appropriation.**

Background: The three-sector SOAR program to support D.C. schools and parents was established by Congress in 2003. Since the 2004-2005 school year, nearly 12,000 D.C. students have received Opportunity Scholarships to attend the school best suited to their needs, and many families have chosen one of our fine Catholic schools.<sup>2</sup> The underlying SOAR Act received a four-year reauthorization in 2019 extending this successful program through 2023 (P.L. 116-94), so now explicit reauthorization is another critical priority.

With respect to the OSP leg of the SOAR Act, student participation increased nearly 50 percent since this last reauthorization. However, the SOAR Act has been level-funded for the last seven years, well below the annual \$60 million authorization, which significantly limits the number of scholarships available to families in need, and results in many families being turned away from the empowering assistance they want and need.

To illustrate, OSP was able to accommodate 1,852 low-income students in the 2021-2022 school year.<sup>3</sup> But, due to inadequate funding, the program was able to provide 1,409 student scholarships in the 2024-2025 school year; that is, 24 percent fewer children were able to receive scholarships than in 2021-2022. These reductions hurt the people who need help the most. The average income of an OSP family is roughly \$24,000 per year, with 44 percent of them receiving public benefits; 94 percent of participating children are African-

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<sup>1</sup> See “Federal Payment for School Improvement” for District of Columbia appropriations, page 1067.

<sup>2</sup> <https://servingourchildrencdc.org/about-us/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://servingourchildrencdc.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/DC-OSP-Program-Fact-Sheet-SY-2021-22-1.pdf>

American and/or Hispanic; and 37 percent live in Wards 7 or 8, the most disadvantaged sections of the District.<sup>4</sup> These are the families whose educational lifeline is at risk of being taken away.

Need for Clean Appropriation with Adequate Funding: The current-level funding of \$17.5 million for OSP requested in the president's budget for FY 2026 is completely insufficient to keep up with inflation, much less meet the growing needs of D.C. families. As both a practical matter and one of equality, funding must increase in order to maintain scholarships for the District's underprivileged families who believe that a non-public school is the best option for their child(ren). The committees and Congress should also take care to please ensure a clean appropriation.<sup>5</sup>

For the same reasons, we would also ask that you expressly acknowledge the statutory discretion of the OSP Administrator to forego annual inflationary increases in the individual student scholarship awards. Hundreds of students lost their OSP scholarship in the 2022-2023 school year, and more are certain to follow if there are fewer scholarships due to increased monetary awards. The OSP students must be a priority.

The Catholic Church teaches that parents are the first and primary educators of their children and, therefore, have the right to select the best educational environment for their child. To assist them with this sacred duty, the Church has clearly articulated that the state has a fundamental obligation to support parents in fulfilling such a right.

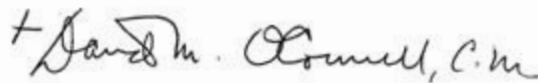
“As those first responsible for the education of their children, **parents have the right to choose a school for them** which corresponds to their own convictions. This right is fundamental. As far as possible, parents have the duty of choosing schools that will best help them in their task as Christian educators. Public authorities have the duty of guaranteeing this parental right and of ensuring the concrete conditions for its exercise.”<sup>6</sup>

We thank you for your consistent support of the SOAR Act, which advances the fundamental obligation of the state to support parents by ensuring that they have access to their choice of quality traditional public schools, charter schools, or non-public schools. **Please include full authorized funding of \$60,000,000 for the SOAR Act without restrictions and recognize the authority of the OSP Administrator to exercise scholarship award flexibility in your FY26 Financial Services and General Government appropriations package.** We also look forward to Congress later formally reauthorizing SOAR.

With prayerful best wishes,



Robert Cardinal McElroy  
*Archbishop of Washington*



Most Reverend David M. O'Connell, C.M.  
*Bishop of Trenton*  
*Chairman, Committee on Catholic Education*

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<sup>4</sup> [https://servingourchildrendc.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/DC-OSP-Program-Fact-Sheet-SY-2023-2024\\_11.2024-1.pdf-002-1-1.pdf](https://servingourchildrendc.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/DC-OSP-Program-Fact-Sheet-SY-2023-2024_11.2024-1.pdf-002-1-1.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> In addition to full funding, it is also vital that the OSP appropriation is not encumbered with restrictive language which imposes undue conditions in order for schools to accept OSP students. Opponents of OSP have previously sought such limitations and the current the D.C. Council Bill 26-261, the Fiscal Year 2026 Federal Portion Budget Request Act of 2025, would impose restrictions that require participating schools to certify compliance with the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act, from which these schools receive no funding. Neither the public school nor charter school sectors of SOAR are subject to conditions, so conditions should not be placed on OSP-participating non-public schools either. By limiting the ability of low-income families to select the school best suited for their children, such language can only harm the families that the SOAR Act is intended to serve. We urge the continued exclusion of this debilitating language.

<sup>6</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2229 (citing *Gravissimum Educationis*, 6)(emphasis added)