

Congressional Hearing on the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program

Before the United States Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs

Written Statement for Tiffany Dunston

May 13, 2009

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for having a hearing on the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program. It is a tremendous honor that you invited me to speak with you about my experiences with the D.C. OSP. Being selected for a Scholarship changed my life and I hope to be the first college graduate in my family.

My family was overjoyed when I was selected to receive a DC Opportunity Scholarship before entering my freshman year of high school. I had dreamt of going to Archbishop Carroll high school but that was not possible. I lived with my grandmother who is disabled and she could not afford to send me to the school of my dreams. She applied for the scholarship because she wanted the best education for me.

Receiving a scholarship was a blessing for my family and put me on the path to success. I grew up in a neighborhood with a lot of poverty and crime. And there were such low expectations for kids in my neighborhood schools. I would watch kids hanging out on the streets and not going to school. My family also experienced our own tragedy. My motivation to get the best education possible was my cousin James who was shot and killed at 17. James was planning to attend college and play basketball. My cousin was going to be the first college graduate in my family, but he died before he was given that opportunity. Now I'm trying to step in his shoes and finish what he started. I am always thinking of what he could have done. To my family and to myself, I am a representation of what he could have done for my family and community. Through the DC OSP, I was afforded the opportunity to do just that. With the help of the scholarship my dream was realized. I had a say, a choice, in my education.

Now when I look back on my high school years I can definitely say that "I came a long way." This personal journey was made possible by my education at Archbishop Carroll. The environment at Carroll is so different from public schools in DC. From the activities and curriculum to the way we are expected to treat our peers and our studies, I was constantly pushed to be a better person and a better student. At a public school, there are constant distractions from school

work. With the scholarship, I was able to attend a school that provided a caring environment as well as a school where one-on-one relationships with teachers were possible. Additionally, Archbishop Carroll gives you a moral education: what is right, and what not to do. The rigorous environment provided by Archbishop Carroll helped me to become the hardworking individual I am today.

I just finished my freshman year at Syracuse University, where I received almost a full scholarship. I'm excited to go back for my sophomore year, and plan on majoring in biochemistry and minoring in French. I do look at myself as a DC success story, but I am not the only one who has seen such achievement. I have friends who are in the same place as I am. They were able to have a scholarship and they're so happy with their experiences and how their future now looks.

I was lucky enough to receive the Opportunity Scholarship for all four years of high school. Had my scholarship been terminated halfway through, I would not have been able to graduate from Archbishop Carroll at the top of my class. I am so grateful for this opportunity – and sad that the other families won't have the same opportunity for their children if this program is taken away.

While I was able to come a long way, I see the challenges that kids in DC still face. I am determined to be a part of this fight to continue this scholarship for other students. I have been very blessed and would like others to have this same opportunity. I am determined to build a better life for myself and through this Opportunity Scholarship I am on that path. I want others in my community to have that chance as well.

You have the ability to give other D.C. children the opportunity I had. My education gave me the chance at a successful future. Please don't end a program that worked for me and is benefiting tons of other children. Three years from now I'll be walking across a stage receiving my college diploma. Without the OSP, none of this would have been possible