

Testimony of Yisehak Abraham  
HSGAC Hearing - February 26, 2019

Good afternoon Chairman Johnson, Senator Scott and other guests. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss my experience with the Opportunity Scholarship Program (OSP). It is truly an honor and awesome responsibility to sit before you representing all past, present and future Opportunity Scholarship recipients and to advocate on their behalf.

The D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program (OSP) was created in 2004 with bi-partisan support in response to the growing need for access to quality educational options for D.C. families. It is the first federal government initiative to provide scholarships for grades K-12 for low-income children to attend a private school. The program began as part of a city-wide effort to improve all of the District's educational sectors – public, public charter and non-public – in an effort to expand quality educational experiences for District families.

It was subsequently reauthorized twice and thanks to your leadership and efforts hopefully will be reauthorized again. Why should it be reauthorized? Let's take a look at the impact it's had since inception.

Over 24,351 D.C. children have applied to the OSP since the program was created.

- Over 10,701 students have been awarded an OSP scholarship
- 1,653 OSP students enrolled in participating schools last school year
- 50% of OSP students received SNAP and/or TANF benefits last school year
- \$23,285 was the average annual household income for families using the scholarship in 2018.
- 66% of OSP students enrolled reside in Ward 4, 7, and 8
- More than 98% of OSP students graduate, and 86% of those students enrolled in a college.

So, who is this program serving or who has it served? Me and thousands like me. Students and families who were looking for a choice that was a better or the best fit for their educational future. A choice that would not be available to them were it not for the existence of the OSP.

OSP has had a tremendous, positive impact on my life. From kindergarten through the fourth grade, I attended a D.C. public school. However, by the fourth grade, I felt that something was not right; that the school I attended was not necessarily the **best** fit for me.

In the fifth grade, I had the privilege of being awarded a scholarship to attend a private school through the OSP. My family chose to send me to Rock Creek International School located in DuPont Circle. The transition to Rock Creek felt magical, to say the least. The school had laptops for each student to take home, language classes, spectacular teachers who cared just as much about **how** I learned, as opposed to just **what** I learned, and more.

I wrote my first extended research essay, which was over ten pages long on the ancient Olympic Games. The following summer I even went to Greece through the school. I continued with the OSP and attended Archbishop Carroll High School, a college-preparatory Catholic school. I graduated from Carroll in 2012 and from Columbia University in 2016 with a B.A. in Economics.

Currently I am a Research Associate at the American Enterprise Institute where I focus primarily on financial markets. In the future, I hope to continue to utilize economics to analyze policies to benefit the public.

The OSP program allowed me and my family a choice. A choice, a future, if you will that would not have been if the OSP program had not existed. Can someone here tell me my choices should have been limited because I came from a different part of DC? Should any child be told that their choices have to be limited if we have a program that works and can have a tremendous and positive impact on their lives?

Senator Johnson, all members of Congress, please reauthorize the OSP program and keep this critical program available for years to come. Thank you.