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URGENT ACTION ALERT

DATE: March 25, 2011
TO: Concerned Parties
FROM: Hilary O. Shelton, Director, NAACP Washington Bureau

U.S. House of Representatives to Vote on NAACP- Opposed School Voucher Program

**VOTE MAY OCCUR AS EARLY AS TUESDAY, 3/29/2011 ON EXPANDING A
PILOT PROGRAM IN D.C. THAT WAS SLATED TO END IN 2008**

THE ISSUE:

As early as Tuesday, March 29, 2011, the U.S. House of Representatives is scheduled to vote on H.R. 471, the mis-named *Scholarships for Opportunities and Results Act*. The NAACP is vigorously opposed to this legislation which extends and expands a pilot program of school vouchers in the District of Columbia which began in 2003 and was set to expire in 2008. We stand against H.R. 471 due to the fact that the 5 year pilot program in D.C. was, by all accounts, a failure; neither the majority of D.C. residents nor their democratically elected representatives want the program; and due to our underlying opposition to school vouchers.

The NAACP has consistently supported investments in our public schools that will benefit all students, not just potentially a few. School vouchers do not offer a collective benefit. Vouchers take critical resources away from our neighborhood public schools, the very schools that are attended by the vast majority of African American students. Furthermore, private and parochial schools are not required to observe federal nondiscrimination laws even if they receive federal funds through voucher programs. In fact, many voucher proposals often contain language specifically intended to circumvent civil rights laws, and many proponents insist voucher funding does not flow to the school but instead to the parent or student precisely to avoid any civil rights obligations. This specificity in language allows private institutions to discriminate on the basis of religion, gender, disability and language proficiency – and even merit, again, despite the fact that they are receiving taxpayer funds.

In addition to our philosophical opposition to vouchers overall, the NAACP is opposed to an expansion of the D.C. voucher program as established by H.R. 471 because of its ineffectiveness, and the fact that it is a classic example of Congress overriding the wishes of the District's democratically elected officials. All five of the federal studies that have analyzed the existing program, which would be expanded under H.R. 471, concluded that the program is ineffective, and in some cases have led to an abuse of taxpayers' money. Specifically, Department of Education studies have concluded that the voucher program has had no effect on the academic achievement of students who use vouchers. Federal studies have also demonstrated an alarming number of accountability shortcomings in the program. Examples include federal taxpayer dollars funding tuition at private schools that do not even charge tuition, schools that lacked city occupancy permits, and schools employing teachers without bachelor's degrees or certifications.

Our opposition to the D.C. voucher program is further compounded by the fact it is not supported by the majority of the District's residents, and is a classic example of Congress overriding the wishes of the District's democratically elected officials. The Mayor of the District of Columbia, Vincent C. Gray, said it best, perhaps, when he said "Decisions about educational options in the District of Columbia ought to be made at the state and local level just as those choices are made across this nation."

THE ACTION WE NEED YOU TO TAKE:

Contact your Representative **and URGE HIM / HER TO OPPOSE AND VOTE AGAINST H.R. 471, THE D.C. SCHOOL VOUCHER BILL.** To contact your Representative, you may:

Make a Phone Call:

Call your Representative in Washington by dialing the Capitol Switchboard and asking to be transferred to your Representative's office. The switchboard phone number is **(202) 224-3121** (see message section, below).

Write a Letter

To write a letter to your Representative, send it to:
The Honorable (name of Representative)
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

**A SAMPLE
LETTER IS
ATTACHED**

**No time
to mail a
letter!
Call, fax
or e-mail
today!**

Send a Fax

If you would like to send a fax, call your Representative's office (through the Capitol switchboard) and ask for his or her fax number (you can use either the attached sample letter or the message box, below).

Send an E-Mail

To send an e-mail to your Representative, go to www.house.gov, and click on "*Write Your Representative*" (on the left hand side, just under "find your Representative"). This will help you identify who your congressman is and how to contact him/her.

THE MESSAGE:

- All five of the federal studies that have analyzed the pilot DC Voucher program concluded that the program is ineffective in that it has not resulted in higher academic achievement for students who use the vouchers, and in some cases have led to an abuse of taxpayers' money.
- The D.C. Voucher program is not supported by the majority of the District's residents, and is a classic example of Congress overriding the wishes of the District's democratically elected officials.
- School vouchers do not offer a collective benefit. Vouchers take critical resources away from our neighborhood public schools, the very schools that are attended by the vast majority of African American students.
- Furthermore, private and parochial schools are not required to observe federal nondiscrimination laws even if they receive federal funds through voucher programs. This means that they can discriminate on the basis of religion, gender, disability and language proficiency – and even merit, despite the fact that they are receiving taxpayer funds.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION TO THIS IMPORTANT MATTER!!!

If you have any questions, call Hilary Shelton at the Washington Bureau at (202) 463-2940

MEMBERSHIP IS POWER! JOIN THE NAACP TODAY

Sample

(date)

The Honorable _____
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

RE: OPPOSITION TO H.R. 471, SCHOOL VOUCHERS IN D.C.

Dear Representative _____;

As your constituent, I strongly urge you to oppose and vote against H.R. 471, the mis-named *Scholarships for Opportunities and Results Act* when it comes before you on the floor of the House of Representatives. Expanding the existing D.C. voucher pilot program would be a mistake because, among other problems, the program has proven to be ineffective and, in some cases, a blatant abuse of taxpayers' money. Furthermore, the voucher program is not supported by the majority of the District's residents nor by their democratically elected officials. Lastly, I oppose school vouchers not only in D.C. but as a national policy as well as they do not offer a collective benefit to the education of our youth, and voucher programs lead to taxpayer monies going to schools which do not abide by the civil rights laws and regulations of our Nation.

All five of the federal studies that have analyzed the existing D.C. voucher pilot program, concluded that the voucher program has had no effect on the academic achievement of students who use vouchers. Furthermore, federal studies have also demonstrated an alarming number of accountability shortcomings in the program including federal taxpayer dollars funding tuition at private schools that under normal circumstances do not even usually charge tuition, schools that lacked city occupancy permits, and schools employing teachers without bachelor's degrees or certification. My opposition to the D.C. voucher program is further compounded by the fact it is not supported by the majority of the District's residents, and is a classic example of Congress overriding the wishes of the District's democratically elected officials.

In more general terms, school voucher programs do not offer a collective benefit. I support investments in our public schools that will benefit all students, not just potentially a few. Vouchers take critical resources away from our neighborhood public schools, the very schools that are attended by the vast majority of African American students and others. Furthermore, private and parochial schools are not required to observe federal nondiscrimination laws, such as Title IX, even if they receive federal funds through voucher programs. This allows private institutions to discriminate on the basis of religion, gender, disability and language proficiency – and even merit despite the fact that they are receiving precious taxpayer funds.

I look forward to working with you to ensure that the federal government invests wisely and adequately in our Nation's public schools so that all of our children may grow up well educated and ready to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century. Please contact me in the very near future to let me know of your position on H.R. 471.

Sincerely,

(sign and print your name and
remember to include your address)