

# **The Scholarships for Opportunity and Results (SOAR) Act**

## **Amendment to be offered by Senators Lieberman-Collins-Feinstein-Byrd-Voinovich-Ensign**

**Purpose:** provides a 5-year reauthorization of the Opportunity Scholarship Program. The Opportunity Scholarship Program (OSP) provides scholarships to low-income students in the District of Columbia, particularly those students attending failing schools, to allow them to attend a private school in the District.

**Authorizations:**     \$20 million for District of Columbia Public Schools  
                              \$20 million for District of Columbia Public Charter Schools  
                              \$20 million for District of Columbia Opportunity Scholarships

### **Provisions:**

- Continues the OSP program for current and new students to provide expanded opportunities and choices for low-income students in the District of Columbia to attend private schools, at least until the public schools in the District of Columbia have adequately addressed shortfalls, and students in the public schools are testing in mathematics and reading at or above the national average.
- Increases the scholarship amount from the current level of up to \$7,500 to \$9,000 for grades K - 8 and \$11,000 for grades 9 – 12. The scholarship cap has not been increased since the program's enactment in 2004. These are caps. Where tuition, fees and costs are less than the cap amount, the scholarship will be less.
- Adds a sibling preference so as not to separate families.
- Maintains current eligibility requirement that income not exceed 185% of poverty. Increases the limit to 250% of poverty only for families already participating in the program to allow children participating in the program to stay in the program, and to ensure there are no disincentives to families to accept job promotions or get married.
- Continues ongoing evaluations conducted by the Institute of Education Sciences.

### **Reforms:**

- Requires participating schools to have a valid certificate of occupancy issued by the District of Columbia
- Requires proof of adequate financial resources for schools operating less than 5 years.
- Requires adequate financial systems, controls and policies to ensure that funds are used in compliance with the program.
- Requires that core teachers of OSP students have a baccalaureate or equivalent degree.
- Requires participating schools to meet DC accrediting standards.
- Requires regular site visits