

Opportunity Agenda

The CHOICE Act

Creating Hope and Opportunities for Individuals and Communities through Education

The CHOICE Act seeks to expand opportunities and foster success by providing students and parents greater choice when it comes to education. Senator Scott strongly believes that great teachers can make all the difference in a child's life and every student should have access to the school that best suits their unique needs.

I. IDEA (INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES EDUCATION ACT) PORTABILITY

The CHOICE Act empowers parents of a child with a disability under IDEA to choose the educational option that best suits their child's unique needs. Approximately 6 million students with disabilities ages 6-21 receive educational services under IDEA. Given the share of federal funds compared to state funds, the portability option is limited to states with a choice program of their own in effect.

- 1) Encourages States to establish school choice programs for students with disabilities by providing startup funds from an existing section of IDEA to support the design and initial implementation of a disability choice program.
 - Creates an authorized activity, not a new program.
 - Allows existing funds to be used to support school choice.
- 2) Enables states with a disability school choice program in effect to make their federal IDEA dollars portable to further expand educational options for children with special needs.

II. MORE OPPORTUNITIES FOR MILITARY FAMILIES

The CHOICE Act expands educational options to ensure military families have access to high-quality education. According to the Department of Defense, approximately 200,000 children live on domestic military installations. Multiple deployments can compound the impact of parental absences on academic achievement, and these families who sacrifice so much should be able to send their child to the public or private school of their choice.

- 1) Creates a new program under Department of Defense Impact Aid to provide scholarships to military children living on bases without Department of Defense Education Activity schools.
 - Authorizes \$10 million annually for FY14-18, offset by a \$10 million decrease in the Department of Education's Salaries and Expenses account.
 - Defense Secretary must select at least 5 bases to participate in the 5 year pilot program.
 - A lottery is conducted if more eligible students apply than funds are available.
 - Scholarships would be the lesser of: a) tuition, fees, and transportation *or* b) \$8,000 for elementary; \$12,000 for high school—indexed for inflation.
- 2) Requires an annual report as well as a final report from the Secretary of Defense on participation numbers, applicants, participating schools, and parental satisfaction.

III. DC OPPORTUNITY SCHOLARSHIP (OSP) EXPANSION

The CHOICE Act makes reforms to the DC OSP to afford high quality educational opportunities to *more* low income students in our nation's capital. The program has served more than 5,000 disadvantaged children, regardless of their zip code, since 2004. However, with more than 22,000 students on DC charter school waitlists this summer and the closure of 15 DC public schools in 2013, it is evident more choices are needed in our nation's capital.

- 1) Expands educational options for low income students by requiring excess carry-over funds that are not needed for the continuation of current participants' scholarships be used for:
 - Program promotion and outreach to increase applications and future enrollment (2%).
 - New scholarships to increase participation (remaining amounts).
- 2) Ensures children currently enrolled in private schools who meet all of the DC OSP eligibility requirements are not unnecessarily excluded from participation in the program.
 - Dept. of Education arbitrarily deemed these children ineligible (82 in 2013 alone).

www.scott.senate.gov



/SenatorTimScott