

STOP D.C. VOUCHERS NEWS RELEASE

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www.stopdcvouchers.org

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Contact: Melody Webb

Melodywebb@lobbyline.com,

(202)554-8519, (202)276-9253, cell

Stop DC Vouchers to Redouble anti-voucher efforts in face of House panel vote for D.C. vouchers

Anti- Voucher Advocates Call Disappointing but Not Devastating House Panel Vote Approving DC Voucher Plan

Washington, D.C. -- Stop D.C. Vouchers calls disappointing but not devastating the vote by U.S. House of Representatives Government Reform Committee July 10th that narrowly approved the school voucher bill, HR-2556, by a vote of 22 to 21 almost strictly along partisan lines. The bill is the second of the 108th Congress to seek a voucher program for D.C. This bill, authored by Rep. Tom Davis (R-Virginia) succeeds the first by Rep. Jeff Flake (R-Arizona).

The legislation would provide \$15 million to create a taxpayer-funded private school tuition program for 2,000 children; there is an estimated 80,000 children in Washington, D.C.'s system of traditional and charter public schools. The bill will now likely proceed to the floor of the House for a vote. Many expect that the Republican-dominated House will pass the bill. "It is a travesty for our city's children that the will of their heavily Democratic, African American parents will be overridden by that of the Republican-dominated Congress. What are we teaching our children?" states Stop D.C. Vouchers.

"This vote is clearly a blow to our anti-voucher efforts. We are bowed but not beaten. This vote on Rep. Tom Davis' bill, HR-2556, gives our effort momentum, bringing home to public education supporters like never before the fact that we are fighting for the life of public education. It brings home to home rule advocates like never before that we are fighting for the life of home rule. We are determined to keep fighting until Congress listens to us" Stop D.C. Vouchers indicates.

The House panel on the 10th rejected an amendment to HR- 2556 that would have provided supplemental funding to traditional public and charter schools. The panel also voted down an amendment aimed at ensuring accountability measures were included in the voucher plan.

At the local level, on Wednesday, July 10 Councilmember Adrian Fenty along with Councilmembers Cropp and Mendelson scrapped plans to co-introduce an anticipated anti-voucher resolution in the Council due to failure to pull together the votes for the passage of the resolution that had the Council repudiating the congressional school

voucher plan for D.C.. Councilmember Fenty has stated that pressure from the Bush Administration kept many Councilmembers reluctant to voice opposition out of fear that the Republican-majority Congress would use its budget approval authority to punish the Council if it opposes the voucher plan.. See the July 9 edition of the Washington Times article by Patrick Badgley.

Stop D.C. Vouchers will continue to press the case of the residents of D.C., who because of congressional oversight, are subject to Congressional legislation for D.C. The voucher legislation is expected to be presented for vote before the full House of Representatives. Before it becomes law a voucher plan must be approved by both the Senate and the House and presented to the President of the United States, who may veto or approve it.

From the House, the bill could be taken up by the Senate, in one of several ways. It could come up as a stand-alone piece of legislation, in which case some believe it would be harder to pass the full Senate. The Senate this session has already rejected two measures to approve vouchers under the special education law. Expected by most is that Davis' voucher plan will be presented in the Senate as a 'rider' attached to the D.C. Appropriations bill, a popular vehicle for Congress to get passed their own legislative proposals that are unpopular with D.C. residents.

"The voucher legislation will likely become an add-on to D.C.'s budget bill. This is how they do it. They will blackmail us with the voucher plan, holding up approval of our budget, until we cry 'uncle' and acquiesce to their pressure to accept vouchers. They always stoop to tying up our much needed locally raised dollars to get their way in D.C.. It's despicable; it's un-American. It is telling: if the conservatives pushing this voucher plan really cared about D.C.'s children, they would give their parents full democratic rights to run the school system without congressional interference so that public education can get the support that it needs. This is why this predominantly African American city needs full democracy - so that we are no longer vehicles for this ideological agenda of some members of Congress." states Webb, a DCPS parent and graduate and director of Stop D.C. Vouchers, an effort mobilizing pro-public education advocates to fight the voucher push.

"We hope that it doesn't even make it past the House floor. The Senate is our hope, where because we have no representation, we must call upon members like Senator Edward Kennedy to stave off this voucher plan. We look to the Senate for a reasoned and responsive approach to what residents of D.C. are saying about vouchers. In accordance with what we really want, the Senate should say no to this voucher plan" says Melody Webb.

Stop D.C. Vouchers plans to redouble its efforts to fight the plan. "The narrow passage of the legislation gives us great hope that we can still influence the process. We are not giving up the fight."