

Good morning Chairman Davis, Congresswoman Norton and other members of the committee. My name is Kelly Valentine and I am the Interim Director of the District's Tuition Assistance Grant Program (DC TAG). I am proud to be here today to provide testimony on the success of the DC TAG program and the unprecedented value that it has added to numerous families across the District of Columbia.

Your support and efforts to make this program a reality is, without doubt, one of the cornerstones to ensuring that the Williams' Administration realizes its goal to strengthen children, youth, families and elders. In particular, in the 12 days that I've been working in the DC TAG office, I am impressed by this program's ability to disperse more than \$63 million dollars to 6527 students and am excited by the possibility of doubling the impact of this service to the community as we embark on the next phase of programming.

While you consider reauthorizing the program, I implore you to also add to your thinking a few facts that speak to DC TAG's overwhelming success.

While the first cohort of students who took advantage of the grant are preparing for graduation, we anticipate that we will all soon realize benefits

that the program has has for students, entire families and their communities. To put this reality into perspective, let me begin by providing you with some hard numbers. To date, close to \$29 million dollars has been dispersed to public institutions across 46 states and the District of Columbia. Over \$23 million dollars has been dispersed to public and private HBCUs. Nearly \$3 million dollars has been dispersed to colleges and universities in the Washington Metropolitan Area. It should be noted that Virginia, Maryland and D.C. round off the top 5 states receiving DC TAG grants. These figures speak directly to our student's desires to broaden their horizons, as well as the institutions' willingness to support the District's efforts to provide residents with a vast array of first class options for higher education.

Moreover, the students that have benefited from DC TAG reside in every ward in the city. Ward 4 continues to lead the way, at 19% of students using the program, followed closely by Wards 5, 7, 8 and 3, at 17%, 16%, 11% and 10%, respectively. Initial surveys of graduating high school seniors from DCPS and charter schools indicate that for 75% of these students, DC TAG has made the difference in their decision to continue their educations beyond high school. Sixty-five percent of the surveyed students indicated

that the existence of the DC TAG program has enabled them to exercise their right to choose the college that they feel will best suit their needs. Fifty-five percent of the students surveyed will be the first in their families to pursue higher education. It is clear from these results, amongst others, that DC TAG program is meeting and exceeding initial expectations framed in the unparalleled legislation signed into law on November 12, 1999.

To encourage even greater participation in the program, DC TAG has made a number of notable adjustments in its program implementation. To name a few significant changes, DC TAG has redesigned its application to be more user friendly and we are working diligently to bring it online by June. Also, we look forward to working with DC CAP to strengthen retention efforts already underway under their leadership. In addition, we are working with the business offices of participating institutions to develop seamless integrated disbursement processes. These and other operational improvements coupled with strategic marketing and outreach efforts will make certain that DC TAG continues to be successful.

Most importantly, as Mayor Williams has indicated, to ensure the program's continued success, DC TAG needs annual appropriation of at least \$25.6

million dollars. This will surely enable us to realize the program's anticipated outcomes.

As the Mayor once said, DC TAG has made the dream of attending college a reality for thousands of District residents. And, in a few minutes you will hear first hand testimony on how DC TAG has made attaining a first class education a possibility for District students.

In conclusion, I thank you for the opportunity to testify before you on the District of Columbia Tuition Assistance Grant Program and look forward to answering any additional questions that you may have.