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July 21, 2011

The Honorable Rahm Emanuel
Mayor, City of Chicago
Office of the Mayor
121 N. LaSalle Street
4th Floor
Chicago, IL 60602

Dear Mayor Emanuel,

I wanted to take a minute to applaud you and your wife's recent decision to send your kids to the prestigious Chicago University Lab School. Choosing where one's children attend school is a decision every parent should make. You, Mayor Daley, and President Obama all chose private school for a reason. But what I don't understand is why won't you allow every Chicago parent to make the decision you just made?

As you know, most public schools in Chicago are failing. As of last year, only 55 percent of students in Chicago's public school system completed high school. Low income families have no choice but to stick their kids in Chicago's poor-performing, dangerous public schools. School choice, allowing parents to choose where their kids go to school whether they be public, private, religious, or home schools, is the only reform that will give all parents in Chicago the same right that you have exercised: to give their kids the best education possible.

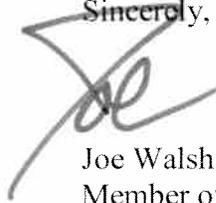
Studies have shown that school choice works. It not only gives students and parents the best opportunity for a quality education, but it also improves the quality of public schools. Washington D.C.'s own D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program (DCOSP) has been widely successful. Since its inception in 2004, the DCOSP has provided more than 3,300 students with the opportunity to attend higher performing schools. The program also touts a 91 percent graduation rate, which is significantly higher than the overall high school graduation rate of 55 percent found in the District. Studies of Milwaukee's school choice programs have shown that those public schools located closest to schools of choice have shown the greatest improvement.

I have spent a good portion of my career working to bring school choice and better educational opportunities to low income Chicago parents. Through my efforts with the Daniel Murphy Scholarship Fund, the Heartland Institute, and Jobs for Youth, I have witnessed firsthand the great potential of parental choice.

I am sure you are aware that much needed school choice legislation almost passed the state legislature in Springfield last session. It is critical that we try to enact this legislation again and provide low-income families in Chicago with the best educational opportunities available. Quality education should not belong solely to the rich and the powerful.

Please work with state and local officials to give parents in your city the same basic right that you have exercised. Please work with me and be a champion on this issue. I look forward to discussing with you how you and I can advance this issue for Chicago's low income families. In fact, I would like to invite you to co-host a townhall with me on school choice in Chicago.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Joe Walsh', written over a large, stylized 'X' mark.

Joe Walsh
Member of Congress