

**Joint Hearing of the Senate & House Veterans Affairs & Emergency Preparedness Committees
FY 2009/10 Budget Proposal, Scotland School for Veterans' Children
March 11, 2009**

**Tamika Whitney
Scotland School for Veterans' Children Parents' Association**

Good afternoon, my name is Tamika Whitney and I reside in West Philadelphia. Two of my children currently attend Scotland School for Veterans' Children ("SSVC"). Their attendance is sponsored by their father's service as an honorably discharged veteran of the Coast Guard. My young daughters are flourishing at SSVC as are other students.

SSVC has a 114 year history of being a veteran's benefit that has educated over 10,000 students in a safe, nurturing, residential environment. SSVC offers more than just elementary and secondary education. Governor Curton made provisions to provide for the children of Pennsylvania orphaned during the Civil War era; an era where more than 24,000 soldiers died in a single day.

At current, there are more than 1.5 million veterans in Pennsylvania and over 19,000 Pennsylvania National Guard ("Guard") members. Since September 11, 2001, over 17,000 Guard members have been deployed. Deployment continues while we are in an ongoing "War on Terror" and continue to assist the world with peace keeping efforts. The Pennsylvania Department of Veteran's and Military Affairs ("DVMA") is one of the top 10 employers in the state of Pennsylvania. Even with the current state of affairs of the economy, the Guard is not laying off members. Our country has profited from the dedication to service and protection from veterans, reservist an active duty soldiers. The DVMA and Pennsylvania Guard have had a positive impact on Pennsylvania's economy. In a time when soldiers are still getting wounded and losing their lives their benefits should increase not decrease.

On February 2, 2009, many parents and guardians of SSVC students received, in a letter that was sent by express mail, notification on behalf of the Governor's office that, SSVC was not included in the 2009-2010 budget and would close June 30, 2009. The letter indicated the cost of educating 288 students was excessive and compared residential education with traditional public education. It was a harsh an insensitive blow to the parents, students and staff. It was essentially an eviction notice from the state of Pennsylvania. We were left with little or no options available to find the academic environment that may best accommodate our children. The deadline to apply for Special Admission and magnet schools

in Philadelphia had passed. Charter schools select their children by lottery and most have waiting lists as applications were submitted prior to February 2, 2009. Some parents and students were left feeling hopeless with no options. It has been difficult for parents to locate schools that will accept a matriculating 11th grader. Receiving this notice prior to taking the scheduled state standardized and college preparatory tests has made it difficult for children to concentrate and focus on their education. The current climate of the student body and parents is one of despair and concern.

SSVC has proven its ability to effectively assist in the education and upbringing of leaders and achievers. They are college graduates, servicemen and women, doctors, lawyers, tax payers, living and working in some of your very own communities. The cost of SSVC is a small percentage of a life-long investment that will continue to be re-invested. SSVC employs veterans, former students and grooms potential soldiers. Students and Alumni bring back to their communities, positivity, citizenship, and generational change. Alums have graduated, gone to college, enlisted in the armed forces, served their tours and are now sending their children to SSVC.

When considering the cost, consider the less directly measurable benefits. SSVC is filling a void during the most precious developmental stages of our children lives and establishing stability that may not have come any other way than through SSVC. For some families SSVC was not the first choice and for others it was their only choice. The children that have attended SSVC are from different social, economic and academic backgrounds. A commonality that they share is that they are from a family where a family member gave their committed service to our country.

It is imperative that you know the children develop life long relationships and are exposed to cross cultural relationships through mentors, advocates and supporters by way of teachers, coaches, house parents and administration. The children at SSVC are not just competing academically with other Americans, they are competing globally. SSVC students are being prepped with the tools to survive in college academically and by developing self-discipline, independence and the ability to think critically.

The provision of State funding to operate SSVC has been a valued benefit acknowledging those Pennsylvanians who have protected all of our families. Please consider the consequences and effect closing the school would have on our children, families, SSVC staff and local communities. I implore that you don't view the exclusion of SSVC from budget as having an impact on 288 children, 80 percent from

Philadelphia and 90 percent African American population as small and insignificant. There would be a socioeconomically devastating impact if continued funding is not provided. In time our economy will recover; our children may not. Taking that risk should not be considered.

Thank you.