

# **Supporting our Children, Lifting our Nation**

## **Testimony before the Senate Subcommittee on Children and Families**

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### **SUMMARY**

Today our nation faces many urgent priorities: the economy, healthcare, national security, global competitiveness. But one of the most important issues we face as a nation is one that impacts *all* of these priorities – the well being of our children.

On March 1, I joined President Obama, Secretary Duncan and my husband at an event at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce to officially embark on the most ambitious initiative America's Promise Alliance has ever undertaken. The Grad Nation campaign will mobilize Americans and our more than 400 national partners to end the high school dropout crisis and prepare our young people for the 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce.

The magnitude of this crisis is tragic. One of every three students fails to graduate from high school in this country – over one million students a year. And only about one-third of our high school graduates have enough of the skills required for success in college and the 21<sup>st</sup>-century workforce. Our children and our economy are in jeopardy.

But this is a crisis we can solve. We have seen what success looks like when sound policies and best practices are paired with strong community support. It starts with better schools but we must also recognize that many of the roots of the dropout crisis lie in a shortage of fundamental supports in the lives of our children. We must couple education reform with efforts to ensure that children not only have a good education, but also caring adults in their lives, safe neighborhoods, after-school programs, access to health care and opportunities to help others.

We must also look at this problem with more focus. We know that just 2,000 high schools (12%) produce over half of the high school dropouts in this country. With our business and non-profit partners, we are building powerful, cross-sector collaborations to focus needed resources in these low-performing schools and surrounding neighborhoods.

In order to raise the visibility of children in federal policy and solidify our commitment to the nation's future, we need a coordinated, national action plan. A critical first step is for Congress to create a National Council on Children focused on re-establishing America as a global frontrunner in child well-being.

I ask that you challenge Congress to work with us to build a strong and sustained movement. Individual by individual, community by community, we can create a Grad Nation and show our most vulnerable young people that America is indeed the land of opportunity.