

My name is Diana Simmons, I am a Philadelphia resident and have worked for PECO/ENERGY Co for 29 yrs. I am the mother of Arielle, who is a senior at Cardinal Dougherty High School and Trent Simmons who is in 7th grader at Immaculate Conception School in Jenkintown, Pa.

My husband and I have always valued education and decided that our children's education would be one of our top priorities. We planned our children and had them five years apart so they would not be in college at the same time. We planned everything except my husband's dying from brain cancer on 09-10-2002 at the age of 46. Although they were devastated both my children had a successful school year. My daughter had perfect attendance and a 91 average, my son missed 1 day of school and had straight A's. I promised them if they did what they were supposed to do, I would continue to make sure they were in schools that would give them the best education I could afford.

I never thought I would be a single mother, I thank God for a stable job and their social security benefits that has enabled me to keep my promise to my children to pay their tuition and extra activities. However, I have not been able to save and my daughter's last check will be July of 2008, when I will be planning to send her to whatever university that she will be planning to attend, This is the first time I am afraid that I cannot keep my promise to my daughter.

My best friend lives in Atlanta Ga and her daughter has taken advantage of the Hope scholarship in their State. When I heard Rep Payton on the radio speaking about the REACH Scholars Program I was thrilled and E-mailed his office to offer my support. There is so much negativity reported about decisions that many of our elected officials make that our children need to know that you support their dreams to be the best they can be. Most of my friends are in the same position I am in. I cannot co-sign loans for my daughter and then be over extended to assist my son. My daughter will come out of school heavily in debt just for undergraduate studies, because I make just enough money that we will not qualify for many of the grants once I do my FASA form.

This program is needed in our state. The dropout and attendance rate in our public schools system is why I had to make a decision to send my children to Catholic school. Our children need hope and something to strive for. I believe that if many students knew they had a chance for higher education they would become better students, and have a reason to come to school everyday. I know this is an expensive bill but there should be no price tag on our children's future.