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### **Over 4,000 Rally in Tallahassee to Ask Legislature to Protect Statewide Corporate Tax Credit Scholarship Program**

*Scholarship recipients, parents, educators, business leaders and advocates gather to request further protection and expansion of the state-funded program and to hear Governor Crist pledge his support for school choice.*

**Tallahassee-(Apr. 12, 2007)-** Over 4,000 school-choice supporters traveled from as far as Miami and Ft. Lauderdale to join the nation's largest school choice rally. Supporters united to demand passage of proposed legislation at the 5<sup>th</sup> annual Step Up For Students Rally today in the Capitol Courtyard.

A record number of school choice supporters-representing nearly 35,000 scholarship recipients statewide-passionately gathered in T-shirts that read "Many Faces, One Dream" to express their desires of school choice being viewed as a nonpartisan issue. The proposed legislation will further protect and expand school choice options for Florida's low-income families.

Gov. Crist was the keynote speaker at the Rally and ignited overwhelming cheers when he affirmed his support for CTC scholarships and his dedication to a quality education for all Florida's children.

"If there is one issue we can come together on, it is this," Crist said. "We must find a way to help our low-income children succeed. Let this wonderfully diverse gathering here today be an inspiration for us all to bring every possible effort to help Florida's neediest children. Put aside politics. Put aside rhetoric. Think of nothing, but what will help these children succeed. We owe it to them. We owe it to ourselves. We owe it to Florida."

House Speaker Marco Rubio, R-Miami, and Senator Alfred "Al" Lawson, D-Tallahassee, pledged their support for school choice and the CTC program and their promise of representing their constituents' best interests.

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“In the House of Representatives, we have tried very hard to come up with bold ideas that will make a difference in Florida,” Rubio said. “There is no more powerful idea than the idea of parental choice in education. We now live in a world where our competitors aren’t other states, but other countries. We must create an education system in Florida that can respond to that challenge.”

Moving testimonies were given by Sharonda Perkins, mother of a scholarship recipient from Tallahassee, and Alberto Garrido, a five year scholarship recipient from Hialeah. Both revealed how the CTC scholarship has provided a second chance at an education and future through the eyes of a parent and student.

“If it were not for the second chance this scholarship has given me, I might have slammed the door to my future by dropping out of school, joining a gang and to be quite honest, I don’t even know if I’d still be alive,” Garrido said. “I am making my parents proud, but more importantly, I am proud of myself for the strides I have made.”

March organizers, including **Black Alliance for Educational Options, The Coalition of McKay Scholarship Schools, National Coalition of Latino Clergy & Christian Leaders, Florida Alliance for Choices in Education Florida Alliance for Choices in Education, Florida Chamber of Commerce and Florida State Hispanic Chamber of Commerce**, say the event demonstrated to the Legislature the success of the scholarship programs and asked for additional support of the bills.

The “Many Faces, One Dream” Rally communicated that a diverse group of low-income children with the same dreams of an education and a bright future are benefiting from the CTC scholarship program.

Supporters began at the Civic Center and marched down Madison Avenue to the Capitol carrying signs that had a variety of phrases on them, including “I love my school, let me stay” and “Don’t take away my dreams.”

McKay Scholarship and Corporate Tax Credit scholarship recipients can choose among religious, non-religious, public or private institutions to fulfill their education.

The Corporate Tax Credit program - also known as “Step Up For Students Scholarships” - provides K-12 scholarships that allow more than 15,000 low-income Florida students to attend a private school or out-of-district public school. One hundred percent of corporate contributions go directly to funding scholarships - not a single penny can be used for administrative costs. For more information, visit [www.stepupforstudents.com](http://www.stepupforstudents.com)

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