

Re: SB 874: AN ACT CONCERNING EDUCATION INITIATIVES AND SERVICES IN CONNECTICUT

Dear Education Committee members,

I write to you today to urge you to strike Sections 17 and 18 from the proposed bill SB 874.

The proposed changes to Section 17 would mandate in-person registration of all children being home-educated. This is an invasion of our privacy and a curtailing of the freedoms we as a home-educating community fought so hard for and won decades ago here in Hartford. This freedom to educate our children in the very best way we see fit is precious to us – we who have sacrificed so much of our own time, money, labors, and often even careers to invest in the education and future success of our children. The state of Connecticut has for the last 30 years been a haven for home-educating families, as one of the least restrictive states in the Union, and is actually a destination for many families looking for a place where education in the home is welcomed and embraced. My own parents took advantage of these freedoms – I was home-educated through high school and went on to UConn and have a Mechanical Engineering degree today and a good job in the aviation engineering industry. My brothers were also taught at home and are successfully employed in trades and are homeowners and family men. My wife and all of her siblings, and many of our friends are also graduates of home-education here in Connecticut. All of this was accomplished at no cost to the taxpayers of Connecticut. And all was accomplished under the current freedoms and under the same lack of restrictive regulation we enjoy today. My wife and I, along with my brother and his wife, and many friends of mine have chosen to take advantage of this freedom as well, and actively home-educate our own children. I believe the mandated registrations being proposed by Section 17 are just the first step in clamping down on those freedoms my parents enjoyed, I benefited from, and now take advantage of as a parent-educator myself.

To implement these annual mandated in-person registrations of each home-educated child in CT, as proposed by Section 17, would add additional cost and burden each year to the taxpayers of Connecticut, to parents-educators, to school administrators, and to the Department of Education, Child Protective Services and other state agencies. Parents would need to take time out of already busy schedules to present themselves at the school district offices and likely wait in line to file a form for each student. School administrators in each town would have to process registrations for dozens (and possibly hundreds) of home-educated children each year. Someone within the CT Department of Education would have to create, maintain, and update a database of all these registered students. Someone else (DCF, perhaps, or local or state police?) would have to provide enforcement (in some form not yet identified by the bill) to those families who failed to register, either by choice or by accident, all at a significant cost to the taxpayers of Connecticut. I think we can all agree, we do not need additional cost and burden added to our financially-strapped state, or to the state agencies (DOE, DCF, etc.) already overburdened and struggling to get the job done, or to the parents currently doing an amazing job educating their own children (at their own expense).

The benefits of the registration proposed by Section 17 are not to be found. Being forced to register one's children in person does not benefit any parents wishing to teach their child at home. It does no good for the school district administrators. DCF personnel do not benefit from such a registry any more than they do without it. The only benefit to mandatory registration of home-educated students is the ability to apply further regulation after the population has been identified. I do not consider that a benefit – but a major drawback.

For that matter, the “model curriculum and frameworks” offered by the language of Section 18 would not benefit most home-educated families, either. Some of the beauty of home-education is its infinite customization, its flexibility. Few families will take up the state’s offered Scope & Sequence and use the approved and recommended curriculum the state offers when there’s so much great curriculum available today in all shapes and sizes, at all different price points (including free, by the way!), and in so many different formats to fit the custom needs of any child or family. Frankly, the Connecticut home-educating community has been educating our children for over three decades without this CT DOE-approved curriculum, and has done a great job of it – especially when contrasted with the dismal success rates of the public schools during the same period. We do not need or want the curriculum proposed in Section 18, particularly as we are keenly aware there is no such thing as a free handout from the government. All gifts from the government come with strings attached – and come at a cost to someone.

Both Sections 17 and 18 of bill SB 874 seek to "solve" problems that do not exist. In so doing, they risk limiting the freedom and infringing on the privacy Connecticut home-educating families currently enjoy. They would increase cost and burden on parent-educators, CT taxpayers, and CT agencies already desperate for relief.

In conclusion, as a graduate of home-education and as a parent-educator, I implore you to strike the proposed text of Sections 17 and 18 from SB 874.

Sincerely,

Art Calef, Lebanon

February 28, 2019