

Dear Members of the Connecticut Education Committee,

I am an CT educator and vehemently opposed to SB 874 Section 17.

According to an email sent by Representative Liz Linehan Section 17 was added to an Education Bill as a registry for the Department of Children and Families (DCF): "Recent reports have found that many parents of children who are neglected claim to homeschool but are not actually doing so. I understand that homeschoolers are not neglected — but we know that some neglectful parents abuse the homeschooling option. By registering, if DCF crosschecks families with neglect investigations, they can better serve these kids who actually are being neglected and abused. Does that help to understand why this may bill helpful to DCF and the kids who need intervention? If, after knowing this reasoning, you still believe this is an infringement on your rights, might you have any suggestions on how to achieve the same outcome, but without an objectionable mandate?"

Section 17 mandating that home educated students be registered in person in each district is an unjustified profiling of a population to seize information that DCF could not collect legally. This is discriminatory and unnecessary. DCF already has the ability to "cross check" and investigate a family that has been reported for neglect or abuse. Compiling a list of innocent citizens unfairly violates that tenuous trust between citizens and DCF to invade innocent families private lives only when warranted. It is concerning that this department, with a low long term retention rate and an overabundance of cases, is utilizing its limited resources to profile innocent citizens. According to the latest federal oversight reports the department is still failing on half of the items that they are mandated to improve. Yet, this is not the DCF's goal right now. They have instead strategized a method to compile data on innocent citizens shifting their focus and resources from investigating actual legitimate claims of abuse, which will be dire. In 2017, a child was murdered with an open DCF case and while his sister was reportedly being homeschooled. This tragic story perfectly illuminates that the current system of reporting is absolutely effective. DCF failed to act on the glaringly obvious abuse, and opted to not intervene, which caused his death. This family was reported to DCF repeatedly. This case has been a catalyst for The Office of the Child Advocate to vilify the homeschooling community by skewing statistics and manipulating information to raise suspicion on any family that chooses to educate their child at home despite it being irrelevant. For clarification, there is no evidence that children educated at home are more likely to be abused. The U.S. Department of Health & Human Services reports that 1.3% of students in schools are abused by their parent while only .0035% of children educated at home are abused by their parents. If the safety and wellbeing of children is our only concern, then we should all oppose redirecting DCF attention from actual legitimate cases to innocent people. My response to Rep Linehan, and any other representative that believes DCF needs registries of innocent citizens, is that we already have an impressive and effective system to identify and protect children at risk of abuse. Mandatory and voluntary reports of suspected abuse is an excellent method by all measurements, so the problem is that DCF needs to improve their management

and training so their social workers take action and protect children when an investigation substantiates it.

Additionally, in Section 17 home educators are required to register students in person. Superintendents in many regions have reported that neither public school children or other private schooled citizens are required to register in person. I am incredibly alarmed that CT plans to treat citizens differently based on their educational choices. This is blatant discrimination.

Please vote no to SB 874.

Thank you for your time.
Jennifer Hogrefe