

Please OPPOSE SB 874

My name is Patricia Marr from Groton, CT. I ask you to oppose the home school portions of SB 874, sections 17 and 18. These sections would fundamentally change the current statute for homeschooling in CT.

I oppose these sections for 3 reasons: the current statute works well, the changes will burden the schools and homeschooling parents, and it would not solve the child abuse issues while leading to more invasive losses of freedom.

I understand that this bill is primarily tackling the huge costs of the public school by trying to regionalize the districts. As I read this bill, I could see a detailed timeline of committees and discussion. But embedded in this bill is a sea change for home schooling, without a budgetary or other explanation, without any committee or discussion.

About 30 years ago, the current statute was written with input from all concerned parties and the compromise has served us well since. I have been homeschooling since 1998 and have graduated 7 of my 10 children. I have been able tailor my curriculum to their individual needs, and include occupational training, and activities that suited us. I am not able to attend this hearing because I am currently with 2 of my children competing in NCFCA, a national home school speech and debate competition in New Hampshire. My children are now working in a variety of fields: publishing, medical transcription, fitness training, insurance, home remodeling, horseshoeing, and nurse training. All these individual directions were possible because of home schooling and curriculum choice. The current statute has worked well for us and many others and doesn't need to be fundamentally changed.

Secondly, requiring an annual in-person registration, will burden both home schooling parents and school administrators. In Groton, there are a large number of homeschool families. In September, you would require all of us to descend on the local school just to sign a document. That will take time during the start of the school year, a very busy time, with an influx of people through security. If costs are your concern in CT, why would you create a new burden? One in-person visit will not discover hidden child abuse, but it will burden every single innocent

family home schooling, while creating a new mess for your administrators. Mailing in a Notice of Intent and having a portfolio review at the end of the year is more than sufficient for any discovery process. Other mandatory reporters see our children regularly—pediatricians, family, neighbors, church friends, and of course our co-ops. We are here and we are visible. An in-person visit is a burden.

Finally, I understand that past instances of child abuse have been loosely connected with home schooling. I say loosely, because the children involved were not truly home schoolers that skirted the system but were families that were under the care of DCF and public schools for years but tragically fell through the cracks. I do not blame the schools or DCF for not being able to prevent all child abuse. We live in a free society and one of the risks that free societies allow, is that fallen men will commit crimes. The only way to prevent all crime, and the scourges of child abuse, is to restrict freedom of the entire populace. I know there is always a desire to “do something”, but we need to resist the desire to control everyone.

I see sections 17 and 18 as the beginning of the State to encroach on the rights of parents to direct the education of their children. Other states are currently addressing child abuse concerns with more intrusive measures. Some want annual DCF visits of all preschool families, others want visits by the fire marshal to ensure homes are safe buildings for children, and some have even considered mandatory visits by nurses to all newborn homes to ensure they are being properly cared for. These seem like “common sense” to those focused on preventing child abuse, but they are in violation of our Bill of Rights allowing us to be safe in our homes from government intrusion. When our Founding Fathers crafted the separation of powers, they understood that power concentrated in any section would lead to abuse of power. The only way to completely remove all child abuse is to invade everyone’s homes which would be an abuse of State power.

Our current law recognizes that parents are primarily responsible for the care and upbringing of their children as self-sustaining citizens. Most parents are careful to do this. The current statute trusts parents with this care, understands that society has other safeguards for most abuse, and provides a low burden for schools are parents. Please do not change this statute without considering all the competing interests. Thank you.