

Written Testimony Re: Connecticut SB 874, “AN ACT CONCERNING EDUCATION INITIATIVES AND SERVICES IN CONNECTICUT”

My name is Brandy Minter. I live in Senate District 19. I am a homeschool alumni, and a homeschooling parent. I have been part of the homeschool community for 30 years, both as a child and as an adult, in the state of Texas and the state of Connecticut. I graduated from high school and transitioned to adulthood along with well over a hundred other young people I personally know, all of whom were home educated with zero government oversight or involvement. We consistently adapted well to college and careers, often more easily than our public schooled peers.

SB 874, sections 17 & 18 are deeply concerning to me. Based on my experience and observations, it is my sincere belief that passing them into law would harm the home educated children of Connecticut.

Part of being a homeschooler is the ever present awareness that there are people in the world who fundamentally dislike and distrust homeschooling, and who will turn special scrutiny on any homeschoolers they encounter. This can range from strangers in grocery stores pop quizzing homeschooled kids on random academic subjects, to public servants making it their mission to harass and bully until children are enrolled in the local public school and/or removed from their parent’s home. This may seem like irrational and unrealistic fears, but this is our world, and the stories are real even if they don’t often get heard outside our community.

One day while on a long drive with a good friend, she started opening up about the most traumatic experience of her life - the child abuse investigation her family went through several years before. She told me about huddling together by the window with her mom and siblings, listening intently while a very angry, aggressive social worker screamed at her dad on their front porch. She told me about the 8 hours she and her siblings were held at a social services office for interviews that felt a lot like interrogations. They weren’t given food or water the whole time they were there, and they were forced to strip naked in the desperate attempt to find evidence against her parents. No evidence was ever found, and the case was eventually dropped. The only abuse she suffered as a child was at the hands of the authorities tasked with protecting children from abuse.

I know another homeschooled teen who was arrested the day a social worker showed up at their door while his parents were out. His “crime”? They didn’t have a warrant to enter the house, so he wouldn’t let them in. The case against him and his family had no basis in law or logic and was ultimately thrown out, but it was a hellish experience for their family.

Another homeschooled friend was legitimately abused by his parents. Beaten, periodically denied food for punishment, even waterboarded. His parents were investigated by social services, but they failed completely to hold his parents accountable or protect him from further abuse.

Growing up I felt a pang of terror every time I heard the doorbell ring. From my childhood to this day, seeing one of the children in my family out in the front yard during normal school hours gives me a mild anxiety attack.

What I haven't yet mentioned is that my family was in a fundamentalist Christian homeschool cult, the same one as the Dugger family of the "19 Kids & Counting" reality TV show. It was fairly decentralized, and mild as cults go, but still messed up, and happily it's now just barely hanging onto existence. But it left me acutely aware of the dark side of homeschooling. I've been in the online survivor support groups, and wept over the stories of my peers who were abused and isolated by their brainwashed parents. I've wept over my own story, and the story of my siblings.

The instinct to try and regulate or somehow oversee the homeschooling community, to create some kind of safety net for the kids who need protecting from their own parents - I get that. I really, really do.

I also get that the road to hell is paved with good intentions.

It was the very people who were hyper motivated to protect homeschooled children from their "crazy parents" that sealed our fate. Obviously I can only speak for myself on this, though I believe I was not alone: I'd heard too many stories. Social services and foster care sounded more scary than what we were already going through. They enthusiastically made life hell for families who weren't even doing anything wrong! I couldn't bear for things to get even worse, so rationally the best option for me and my siblings was to just survive to adulthood. The people who should have been able to help us had made themselves into the thing I most feared.

When my own child was in 2nd grade, it became apparent to me that he wasn't just a late reader, he had a learning disability. Probably dyslexia. And we needed help with that. Of all the preliminary options I learned about, the one that was most feasible for us at that time was to get an evaluation through our local public school. It took total desperation to help my son, plus all the courage and faith I possessed to voluntarily show up at a public school and announce that my child was homeschooled, he wasn't learning how to read, and I wanted an evaluation.

But we were among the lucky ones. The administrators, teachers, and special education staff at our local public school made us feel welcome, safe, and supported throughout his evaluation process. They were kind, professional, and thorough, and we walked away empowered with a diagnosis and a path to follow. And some of the fear I'd carried with me my whole life began to melt away. I even felt that if we decided homeschooling genuinely wasn't working for us, I would actually feel comfortable registering my child in that school. It was a healing experience I will forever be grateful for.

Children deserve a good education. They deserve to feel safe, supported, respected, and understood. Homeschooling parents throughout Connecticut have taken 100% responsibility for providing their children with just that. There is no logical reason anyone should have to register with the government to be allowed to keep doing that.

**When you make homeschooling parents feel safe and supported, this has a direct positive impact on their children.** If you only take away one thing from my testimony, please let it be that.

Based on all my experiences and observations, I genuinely believe that forcing registration and unwanted curriculum on the homeschool community will do the opposite of helping the small minority of today's homeschooled children who are actually being abused or neglected. The overwhelming majority of adults in the home education community are deeply invested in the well-being of children, and are best positioned to notice these kids who need help. This legislation hasn't even been passed, yet it has very successfully focused adult instincts on circling the wagons. From what I've seen over and over, when the fear of baseless harassment against good families grows large, an unconscious blind spot for abuse can develop easily.

Homeschooling in Connecticut is not broken. Attempts to "fix" it would be a mistake.