

Subject: Bill SB 874

From: Chemay Morales-James

To Whom it May Concern,

My name is Chemay. I am a former public school special education teacher and currently serve as an equity consultant to schools and non-profits. I'm also an unschooler or homeschooler as some may refer to me as. I am the founder of My Reflection Matters in CT Home Education group & co-op here in our state in support of families choosing to raise liberated children of color.

Our group believes in the freedom, as the primary guardians of our children, to choose the best learning experience for our kids based on their needs, interests, passions, learning styles, personalities, and cultural values. I've worked in education for over 17 years. Let's be honest here. You and I both know school is not a one size fits all model. If we didn't believe this as a country, we wouldn't have so many different types of educational institutions and models offered across the entire U.S. I know of many homeschooling families who have one child in (public or private) school and another being homeschooled. This freedom to exercise educational choice is no different than the freedom bestowed on all other families that have been able to freely send individual children to different schools based on whatever criteria the family has defined for themselves. The difference here is that by proposing to pass SB 874, you are setting up a pathway that allows only a select group of citizens to exercise educational choice and by default takes this freedom to engage in educational choice away from those of us that home educate. Passing SB 874 is a violation of our civil rights as parents to have the freedom that those of you sitting in front of us have exercised for your own children.

We as homeschoolers don't claim our parenting is perfect, but neither are your educational institutions. By taking the steps to regulate our parenting decisions, you are arrogantly claiming your parenting is superior to ours. You have falsely created an image that paints hoemschoolers as neglectful parents and you continue to unethically perpetuate that myth by pushing to regulate us. This unethical behavior needs to stop. There are also families (which, like neglectful homeschoolers, are fewer than the majority) who send their kids to school and are abusing them at home without the abuse being detected by anyone. I've also seen the abuse of classroom teachers and educational systems happen without it being being "detected" because the state doesn't define breaking the spirits of Black and Brown kids as abuse. I've witnessed this spirit-breaking—a social-emotional crisis happening in our schools across the country—and it, unfortunately, has been happening long before any of us in this room were born. If you don't believe me, here are some stories from my homeschooling parents of color sharing why they've chosen to pull or not send their kids to school:

- “We've had some negative experiences with the school system regarding racism and intolerance of our personal views, so it made our decision to homeschool pretty easy.”
- “...our girls were basically being marginalized in public schools and we felt that they weren't getting the same options that their white peers were getting.”
- “I homeschool my son because he doesn't seem to have the personality to sit in a classroom all day and because I want to know for sure that he is getting the education and nurturing he needs as a brown child, who will grow into a brown man.”

- “We are confident that the academics will come, and whatever isn’t learned now (barring extenuating circumstances) can be learned later. But, emotional/mental health and wellness isn’t as easy to come by later, especially if you’ve been broken down along the way.”
- “We are new to homeschooling this year, and currently only homeschool our 10yo [Black boy]. We pulled him from public school at the end of last school year after the school met our requests to meet his needs with an increasingly punitive and restrictive educational environment. It has been so amazing this year to get my son “back” and to see him thriving and loving to learn again.”
- “The curriculum does not satisfy me either. I want to empower my children to not be judged or oppressed. I want to teach history and culture through a person of color lens. There are so many reasons but the most important reason is, I just want my children to be happy, healthy, and empowered.”

Homeschooling is an educational choice no different than school choices such as charters, Montessori, private, etc. Once homeschooling begins to be regulated, we send the message that the state has the final authority over how we choose to parent and have our children educated. Unfortunately, once the state takes baby steps to regulate, that leads to more restrictive regulations such as mandating set curricula and teaching credentials. That can be very dangerous and perpetuate the very inequities many homeschooling families are trying to escape from, particularly those of us that have been most marginalized by the very institutions that are trying to regulate us.

I ask you to please remove Sections 17 and 18 from SB 874. Thank-you.

Sincerely,

Chemay Morales-James

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