

Testimony for Public Hearing
Education Committee
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**Governor's Bill No.874 - An Act Concerning Education Initiatives and Services in Connecticut
Opposition – SB 874 - Sections 17 & 18**

I am writing to you today in strong opposition of the language included in sections 17 and 18 of Governor's Bill No. 874. I am disheartened to see changes to homeschooling legislation buried in the language of this Bill.

Families choose homeschooling for a variety of reasons. For our family, one of our biggest reasons was the freedom to choose both our curriculum and teaching methodologies. I believe there is a common misconception that homeschooling parents do not value their children's education. I have personally heard from friends they could never homeschool because education is too important in their family. In our family we don't homeschool because education isn't important to us, we homeschool because it is of the utmost importance to us. Language in section 18 mentions offering model curriculum aligned with common core to homeschooling families. This is a slippery slope that opens the door to further regulation in the future. There is no logical need to incorporate curriculum into this bill when similar information is already included on the state website.

For our family, freedom to choose our curriculum and independent service providers is critical. One of my children is diagnosed with a variety of learning disabilities that impact the way he processes and retains information. I have spoken with administration in my town, and based on our conversation is it clear our district does not have fully trained staff who can provide the highly specialized training he requires. If we were to enroll in public school it would leave little time for him to access the specialized services he needs while he languished in the school system throughout the day doing school work that did not benefit him. I mention all of this not to criticize our school system, they are doing what they can with the resources they have. I mention this because I think it is imperative you hear testimony from current homeschooling families about why we choose to homeschool and that we have our children's development at the forefront of our decision making.

I am strongly opposed to the language in section 17 of this bill mandating in person registration for all homeschoolers. We spend a considerable amount of money to self-pay for all of the private specialized services our son accesses. We are provided no assistance from our school system regardless of the taxes we pay that fund our school district. We are not allowed to access tutoring, occupational therapy, physical therapy, or speech services within the school system. Even if we were to gain access to services much of what he needs (as mentioned above) isn't available within our school system. To date I have even been unsuccessful with obtaining copies of developmentally appropriate curriculum or materials. We work with an educational consultant and tutor to help guide our programming and have an idea of the type of materials that would be the most appropriate. I find it insulting that in light of the hands-off nature of our school system and the lack of support for our family I would need to go into them in person to register all of my children, none of whom who have ever stepped foot in a public school. What purpose does it serve? There are absolutely no resources allocated from our district for the education of my children so there is no need to account for them for any planning purposes. As far as the argument

that the district needs to know the number of children that could return to education within their system to accurately report for regionalization, if this is true wouldn't the number of students who attend private or religious institutions also be equally important? Yet I see no mention of an in person, or even electronic registration, of those students. In addition, why add the in-person component to the registration? What purpose could that possibly serve? The only logical assumption is that the in-person component is to physically judge our family. What makes the administration staff that will receive in-person registrations qualified to judge my family based on our physical appearance?

One of the most concerning pieces of this bill is the possibility of information being shared with the Department of Children and Families. A local homeschooling family was informed by their representative that the mandatory annual registration would be readily available and shared with DCF. All children deserve to be protected from abuse regardless of how they are educated. Not only is it unfair to subject homeschoolers to increased scrutiny from DCF, but it is a huge burden to place on a system that already struggles with limited resources. With the volume of extra work placed on DCF to cross check homeschooling families how many other children in dangerous situations will slip through the cracks? Is this really the best allocation of resources? Statistically 1.3% of children who attend school away from home are abused by their parents, in comparison 0.0035% of children who are homeschooled are abused by their parents. These numbers indicate that kids who are homeschooled are 371 times LESS LIKELY to be abused by their parents.

I am well aware of the unfortunate case in CT, as well as others around the nation where a child who has been homeschooled has been horrifically, and sometimes fatally, abused. There are no words for the tragedy of these situations. However, we need to remember that regardless of the sensationalism of the case, homeschooling wasn't the culprit. These children, specifically, Matthew Tirado, were failed by an overworked, under resourced DCF system. Adding to their caseload will not serve to reduce these tragic situations, I fear the opposite is true! Given this data, it is illogical to target homeschoolers for potential increased DCF monitoring. Why place this burden on innocent families who are statistically safer than students in public school and consistently score higher academically than public school students?

This isn't a debate about what is better, homeschooling or schooling away from the home, this is about equality. Why place an unnecessary burden on homeschooling families? Please, when considering this Bill, take a moment and deeply examine what the language of section 17 & 18 signifies to homeschooling families. Please think about the families, like mine, who have taken on this adventure to give our children the best possible chance at academic and personal success. Please remember that the faces of homeschooling are kids you see happily running through parks and public places throughout the day. Please remember that these are kids that have plenty of eyes on them to ensure they are well cared for. Please remember that homeschooling parents deserve the same rights and respect as any other parent.

Respectfully,

Alysia Palmisciano