

Testimony for Public Hearing  
Education Committee  
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Governor's Bill No.874 - An Act Concerning Education Initiatives and Services in Connecticut

My name is Kristin Wensel, and I have resided in Killingworth, CT for the last eighteen months. I have been teaching my children at home for the past eleven years. I am against Governor's Bill No. 874, particularly Section 17 (pages 20-21), which revises Section 10-184.

While I understand that the purpose of the proposed changes to the current law is to address concerns over child abuse that goes unrecognized under the guise of homeschooling, I do not believe the requirement to "appear in person" will solve the issue. I do not believe that this bill should include the regulation changes that have been proposed. In addition, I believe that the requirement to appear in person is discriminatory and will in fact only create additional, unforeseen consequences without addressing the main concern it is meant to solve.

As a former resident of MA, I began home educating my children under the regulations of that state. As you may know, MA has strict homeschooling regulations. As such, I was required to submit a notice of intent to the superintendent of the town school district every year. While I never had any trouble receiving approval in the end, there were numerous times when the correspondence with the superintendent's staff was discriminatory, misinformed, and downright hostile. All of my communication was done in writing, sent certified mail, signature required, so that I could have a record of all communications and approvals. Often, the return correspondence I received made it clear that the office staff was unaware of MA law as it applied to homeschools. The town's own registration paperwork requested information that was not required by law. In addition, the town attempted to impose additional requirements that far exceeded its authority under the state homeschool laws. The brief in-person interactions I had with town teachers and school administrative staff were much worse, often ending with personal insults to my intelligence and my integrity. Other families I knew in that MA town who chose to provide the notice of intent in person were verbally abused, had paperwork lost and were harassed for weeks only to be told that everything had been in order from the start. This was not an unusual occurrence; I know of similar situations all over the state of MA. Some were mistakenly reported to DCF because the school system misplaced paperwork. It is common for MA homeschooling families to be forced to call in lawyers to defend themselves against the overreach of the towns – just to be able to exercise the right to educate their own child at home as given to them under the law. Adding a requirement to "appear in person" to file a notice of intent in CT will create a similar unnecessary level of complexity, hostility and administrative headache for both the school systems and the homeschooling families in CT.

Moreover, the requirement specifically requesting that parent educators "physically appear" to register their children with the Department of Education is blatant discrimination. As I understand, parents or legal guardian/caregivers of CT school aged children are not required by law to "physically appear" to register their children for public school. In addition, parents of children in CT

private schools also do not have to appear in person at the Department of Education to enroll their child. Requiring that only parent educators appear in person to register is discriminatory.

Scapegoating an entire community of people is also profiling, falling dangerously close to guilty until proven innocent. The purpose of this proposed bill is to ask parent educators to appear in person so they and their children can be physically scrutinized for signs of abuse, as well as have their information targeted and forwarded to the Department of Children and Families. Let me be clear: no level of abuse is ever acceptable. However, the data shows that children educated at home are at LESS risk of abuse than children in school systems. Data from the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, U.S. Department of Education and other sources show that .0035% of children educated at home are abused by their parents, compared to 1.3% of children who attend schools outside of the home who are abused by their parents. Again, no abuse is acceptable. That said, requiring home educators to register in person with the schools for the purpose of providing the list of homeschooling families to DCF immediately makes all homeschooling families suspect, scapegoating an entire innocent community full of active, upstanding members of society. We are not trying to hide. Home educated children already regularly interact with doctors, dentists, churches, therapists, tutors, librarians, police and many other members of the community who are required by law to report any suspicion of abuse. Why would adding yet another arbitrary meeting with the school staff, one that invites such blatant discrimination, be any further level of protection against abuse? The Office of the Child Advocate already has the power to enter any CT house, at any time, and remove children with no obligation to provide proof of any wrong doing. They already have the legal mandate to protect every child in Connecticut, regardless of where they are being educated. What would this discriminatory physical registration of parent educators accomplish that the state doesn't already have the ability to do?

It strikes me that the Bill No. 874, Section 17 proposal would be similar to requiring all Muslims to register with the state police, in order to track one maladjusted person who claims to follow that religion. That would be discriminatory, an intrusion of rights and a gross overreach of government authority. Similarly, requiring all homeschoolers to appear in person to register with the school system is discriminatory, an intrusion of rights and a gross overreach of government authority.

Again, I would like to strongly state my opposition to Governor's Bill 874. The change to Section 10-184 is misguided, will not address the issue that it is intended to address, and is profoundly discriminatory. I respectfully ask that you vote NO regarding SB. 874, particularly section 17.

Thank you for your time and consideration.