

Dear Education Committee,

I'm writing to oppose SB-874. I am against homeschool registration and the idea of model curricula and frameworks outlined in Sections 17 and 18.

Parents chose to homeschool for a variety of reasons, but most often because we feel our children don't or won't thrive in an institutional environment. Our children are not one size fits all and we don't believe that their education should be either. While some families might like the idea of model curricula and frameworks, homeschooling isn't about recreating the classroom at home. Children can learn at their own pace and focus on the things that are the most relevant to them and the things that bring them joy! Our children enjoy learning! We aren't teaching to standardized testing and truthfully, I am afraid the next step is for our children to be required to test to the model curricula and frameworks provided. I understand the concept of trying to help all students of a certain grade to be at the same place, but the beauty of homeschooling is that it gives children the ability to learn at their own speed. No one wants our children to learn and be healthy, well-balanced, educated adults more than us.

In addition, I don't agree with registration for homeschool children.

“The parent or person having control of a child who provides home instruction to such child shall personally appear annually at the school district office and sign a registration form indicating that such child will be receiving home instruction.”

Not only is this an issue of privacy and inconvenience, but also what is the goal? What is appearing in person annually going to accomplish? I don't believe homeschoolers should be required to register at all, but why must it be annually? A child going to public school doesn't need to register annually. It's assumed they will continue to go to public school unless the district is told otherwise. Why make this extra complicated for parents/guardians who just want to continue their RIGHT to educate their child as they see fit?

Based on discussions within the homeschool community and with our representatives, it seems as though the idea of having a registry of homeschooled children is to have a list for the Department of Children and Families to investigate. Shocking claim, I know. But this is basically the only reason I can think of why registration would be required. We have been told that DCF would like the ability to crosscheck a list to see if a child with an open case is homeschooled. But what is the benefit of this? If there were already an open case, it would be very simple to find out this information on a case-by-case basis. Why violate the privacy of the whole entire homeschooling community for the ability to look at the list for an open case? I am obviously in favor of protecting children from potential neglect and abuse, but this list isn't proactive in that goal at all – unless its true intent is to be a list of children to be investigated.

The language of this bill does not tell us who will have access to this information or even what information will be captured by the registration form. How can we consent to being put on a registry without even knowing how this list can and will be used? What type of protections will homeschooling families have from being terrorized for our choices? And if you think we won't be, you're not paying attention to what's happening around our state and country. Children are being separated from fit parents for less.

Will the form be similar to public school registration that includes our children's medical information? We were recently asked how many homeschoolers don't vaccinate by a representative during a different public hearing because she was unable to get that information from the state database. Could this be another goal? To target homeschoolers for mandated vaccines the way other states are attempting with proposed bills? To find out how many homeschoolers have life threatening allergies that make public school impossible? To find out how many children have learning disabilities that make it difficult to succeed in a cookie cutter education? Because yes, our children's health is another reason why parents chose – and some are forced – to homeschool.

Is this just another way to discriminate against people who don't follow mainstream choices for their children? Please, do not take away our freedom to educate our children by mandating registration. Do not put us on a list to be used to persecute us. We don't want to be data to be used against the things we believe in. The recent history of this state, and even this nation as a whole, has given very many reasons to fear the ways this legislation can be used against us. Please don't let homeschooling be the next target on our back. Please don't let our fundamental freedom of teaching our children be mandated in ways that are harmful.

Train more people to look for signs of actual abuse or neglect. Empower people to make the call without fear of retribution to save these kids who are actually in danger. Please don't let this punish so many good families who just want the best for their children.

Thanks,
Jessica Y.

In addition, although regionalization doesn't affect homeschooling families, please do not vote to condense school districts. Children need the best chance at the best education regardless of whether they are instructed at school or at home. This is not in the best interest of our children.