

Subject: Opposition to H8531 – A Pawtucket Homeschooling Family's Testimony

To the Members of the House Education Committee:

My name is Sarah Ludin and I am writing with my husband, Adrian Wood-Smith, on behalf of our family in Pawtucket to respectfully but firmly oppose H8531. We are a homeschooling family, and this bill would place an unnecessary and harmful burden on families like ours who have made a thoughtful, deliberate, and deeply positive choice to educate our children at home.

We chose homeschooling not to evade anything, but to pursue something — a richer, more integrated, more humane education for our children. Homeschooling allows us to give our children a genuine "feast of ideas" rooted in history, culture, and moral grounding. It allows us to cultivate a love of learning for its own sake, to follow our children's interests, to spend time outdoors, and to be present for our children's moral and intellectual development during the years that matter most.

Our homeschool is not a shadow of a "real" education. It is our family's life together. For us, education is not a service we outsource — it is the very fabric of how we are raising our children to be thoughtful, grounded, capable adults.

Against that backdrop, H8531 is deeply troubling.

Rhode Island's current homeschool law is already working. Families like ours already comply with existing approval requirements: we maintain attendance records, provide instruction in required subjects, and remain subject to all child welfare and protection laws that apply to every family in Rhode Island. There is no gap in the law that this bill fills — only a gap in trust toward families who have done nothing wrong.

The bill's language is dangerously vague. H8531 grants school committees power to deny or defer homeschool approval based on whether instruction has sufficient "competency" and "capacity," or whether approval is in the "best interest of the child." These are subjective standards with no meaningful definition in the bill itself. The bill then delegates the job of defining these terms to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education through future regulation — meaning families today cannot know what standard they will be held to tomorrow. This is not a safeguard; it is an open door to inconsistent and arbitrary decision-making.

The bill could be weaponized against good-faith families. Under H8531, a school committee can deny or defer a homeschool application simply because a truancy petition was filed against the child within the preceding twelve months — even if that petition was the very reason the family sought to homeschool in the first place. A family fleeing a failing or harmful school situation could find themselves trapped, forced to remain enrolled while bureaucratic processes play out for up to 45 school days. For a child in crisis, that delay is not a safeguard — it is harm.

Law-abiding families should not bear the burden of proof. This bill would require parents to demonstrate "good faith," "capacity," and compliance before being granted the right to homeschool — effectively treating every family as suspect until proven otherwise. Existing child protection laws already empower the state to intervene when a child is genuinely at risk. H8531 does not add meaningful protection; it adds bureaucratic friction for the many because of the actions of the few.

Parents are and should remain the primary decision-makers in their children's education.

For our family, homeschooling is not just a preference — it is a key pillar of how we organize our lives and choose to live as a family. We cannot do that if we are required to justify that calling to a school committee using undefined standards that could shift at any time.

I urge this committee to protect the rights of Rhode Island homeschooling families by opposing H8531. The current law is sufficient. Our children are thriving. Please do not make it harder for families like ours to give their children the education they deserve.

Respectfully,

Sarah Ludin and Adrian Wood-Smith (parents to 3 wonderful children)

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