

May 19, 2026

Representative Joseph McNamara
Chair, House Education Committee
Rhode Island Statehouse
Providence, RI 02903

**RE: Testimony in Opposition to House Bill 8531 - An Act Relating to Education -
Compulsory Attendance**

As a homeschool parent in Rhode Island, I am writing to express my opposition to House Bill 8531 authorizing school committees to defer or deny approval of a proposed at-home course of instruction.

My family has been homeschooling in RI for the past 12 years. Additionally, I am connected to the homeschooling community through my volunteer work with ENRICHri, the state's largest secular homeschooling support group. As an advocacy team member, I host informational meetings explaining local laws and procedures for families wishing to pursue homeschooling.

In this role, I have met hundreds of homeschoolers. Some, like myself, choose to homeschool voluntarily, believing that a personalized education that centers the child is the ideal education for their family. Others come to homeschooling as a last resort after making every attempt to work with their school district to help their children who have been bullied or have needs that are not being met by the school system. This is not a partisan issue; it affects all backgrounds, liberal and conservative, religious and nonreligious, financially stable and unstable.

House Bill 8531 states an intention to provide oversight of families who are in truancy situations or have faced criminal or civil charges pertaining to attendance. I am in agreement with this – children should not be pulled from public school to be homeschooled if the parent's intention is just to avoid truancy charges and not to actually provide the child with an education. However, I have serious concerns with the bill as it is written.

First, while the bill purports to pertain only to truancy and attendance issues, there is language included that allows school committees to defer or deny homeschoolers whenever a caregiver is considered to lack "competency" or "capacity". This clause (Section 16-19-2b(1)(iv)) is independent from the truancy and criminal/civil charge clauses and seems to apply to any homeschool family regardless of compliance with attendance. As a homeschooler, this is very concerning as there does not appear to be any guidance on when or why such a determination

would be made, leaving it up to the discretion of each individual school committee on a case by case basis.

Second and relatedly, the wording of the bill is vague and includes many subjective terms such as “best interest of the child” and “competency and capacity” of the caregiver. Again, there is no guidance provided for making those determinations.

In my experience, there is no one way to homeschool. Every family approaches this journey differently. That is truly the joy and freedom of homeschooling—to give each child an individualized education that meets them where they are, expands their horizons, and enables them to become the best version of themselves. The idea that school committees, who have no understanding of the philosophy of homeschooling or the individual circumstances of each child, may be able to subjectively decide when a family is capable of homeschooling is unrealistic and infringes on parents’ rights to educate their children.

Rhode Island’s current homeschool law is considered one of the strictest in the nation and treats families respectfully, acknowledging a parent’s right to educate their child while balancing the need for oversight by the school district as well. I urge you to oppose this bill as written and to maintain homeschool protections within our state.

Sincerely,
Alyssa Crowder