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Dear House Education Committee Members-

I am emailing as a concerned resident of Rhode Island. Several years ago, after learning that our local school district no longer funded gifted programs for students, I made the decision to homeschool my children. It has been an immense blessing, and incredibly fruitful educationally for my daughters. Due to the value I place on my freedom to choose how to best educate my children, I felt it imperative that I share with you the myriad concerns I have with language within House Bill 8531.

I want to express my understanding of the desire of the Education Committee to protect children from circumstances that may be a detriment to their education. I believe it is a worthy endeavor when efforts at protecting children are balanced with protecting the constitutional rights of their parents.

The United States Supreme Court has, on more than one occasion, reiterated the fact that fit parents are presumed to act in their children's best interests. The language used consistently in H8531 would suggest that this constitutionally given presumption could be dismissed at the whim of any school committee. The fitness of parents, their ability to direct and allocate their resources to care for and educate their children, and their ability to choose what is best for their children are **not** aspects that any school committee should ever involve themselves in. Should any public education administrator or body have concerns about the fitness of a parent, they are obligated to report these concerns to the State child welfare systems, which exist expressly to assess such fitness, or lack thereof.

Per state and local law, a school committee member qualifies to be elected if they meet the following requirement: residence within the district the committee serves. There are no educational or professional pre-requisites to become a school committee member. How can a committee with no required educational expertise, specialty, or particular experience be charged with determining whether a fit parent in the eyes of the State possesses the "competence" or "capacity" to provide instruction and accommodations for their own child? Perhaps the suggestion that a school committee could determine capacity and competency would make some measure of sense **if** the members had some special educationally based qualifications, like a PhD in education perhaps. Unfortunately, we know that this is not the case, and most school committee members are merely only residents of their district.

I also wanted to point out that the language used in the section that discusses children with special educational needs comes across as concerningly prejudiced. It suggests that the school committee can decide if the parent "lacks capacity or resources to implement necessary accommodations". How absurd

and insulting to suggest that the school committee- again with no required expertise- can determine if a parent has the resources (which could be defined as financial in nature) to accommodate their own child in their own home. This is a slippery slope to socio-economic discrimination against families with a less than robust financial picture. Again, the United States Constitution imposed no such caveats on parents; no such metric of financial stability has been forced upon them. I effusively encourage the Committee to remove such language that promulgates the idea that special needs parents should face additional scrutiny to be deemed fit to accommodate their own children in their own home.

While I again acknowledge the importance of the Education Committee making efforts at curtailing truancy, I believe the language within this bill is harmful to the parents who have legitimate cause to pursue a course of home education for their children. While the bill allows for legitimate reasons for attendance issues such as those medical in nature, bullying, etc., it still suggests that those parents must then prove their capacity after the truancy petition has been resolved through adequate documentation. This bill allows school committees to subject fit parents to incredible scrutiny when they decide to pull their children from public school. While I believe the suggested processes may catch some number of parents exploiting the system to skirt the truancy laws, my belief is in line with the Supreme Court: that most parents act in the best interests of their children. Imposing invasive scrutiny and unreasonable requirements upon families due to a small number of bad actors is not the American way.

In conclusion, I urge this Committee to significantly amend this bill and remove any language that allows any school committee to assess or determine the capacity and competency of parents who are already deemed fit according to the State, child welfare system, as well as the Constitution of the United States. Allowing this language to remain in this bill also threatens to infringe on the rights of existing and future homeschoolers in our state. This language could encourage similar language to be added to future bills aimed at all homeschoolers, not merely just those struggling with attendance issues already under the purview of the public school system.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. As a constituent of Representative Noret, I look forward to hearing from him regarding these concerns. Should any other member wish to discuss the above concerns, I would be happy to do so, and easily reachable via email or the cellphone number listed below.

Sincerely,

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