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To the Members of the House Committee on Education,

I am writing in support of 2026 **House Bill H8531** relating to compulsory attendance and at-home instruction in Rhode Island.

As the Superintendent of Coventry Public Schools, I fully recognize and respect the rights of families who choose homeschooling as a thoughtful and intentional educational pathway for their children. Many Coventry homeschooling families provide high-quality educational experiences that meet the academic, social, and emotional needs of students. I believe this legislation does not diminish those rights. Rather, it provides reasonable safeguards to ensure that at-home instruction is being used in good faith and in the best interest of children.

In recent years, Coventry Public Schools has experienced a growing number of cases involving students with chronic absenteeism, truancy concerns, and significant disengagement from school who transition abruptly to homeschooling while pending truancy interventions or family court. In some instances, these students later return to public schools with academic skill deficits, gaps in instruction, and diminished readiness for grade-level expectations. This pattern raises legitimate concerns that, in some cases, at-home instruction may be utilized not as an educational alternative, but rather as a mechanism to avoid attendance enforcement without adequate educational supports in place to provide the required instruction.

House Bill H8531 establishes a balanced and reasonable framework that preserves parental rights while also ensuring educational accountability and student welfare. Specifically, the bill would allow school committees to defer or deny approval of at-home instruction under certain conditions related to matters related to truancy or the quality of at-home instruction plan. House Bill H8531 is a mechanism for districts to intervene when attendance concerns suggest that a student may be at risk of educational neglect.

Importantly, the legislation also provides due process protections for families. Parents and guardians are afforded the opportunity to present documentation, demonstrate good faith, and appeal decisions. The bill further recognizes legitimate circumstances such as medical, safety, disability-related, or other substantial reasons that may contribute to attendance difficulties.

For these reasons, I respectfully support House Bill H8531 and encourage its favorable consideration.

Sincerely,

Don E. Cowart II  
Superintendent  
Coventry Public Schools

**“Working Together To Improve Our Schools”**

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