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South Kingstown, Rhode Island

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Rhode Island House Education Committee

Rhode Island State House

Providence, Rhode Island

Re: Opposition to H8531 — An Act Relating to Education – Compulsory Attendance

Dear Members of the House Education Committee,

I am writing as a South Kingstown resident, a mother, and a homeschool parent to express my strong opposition to H8531. While I understand that this bill aims to address truancy, it does so in a way that is punitive, shortsighted, and deeply harmful to families like mine.

My son has a PDA profile - Pathological Demand Avoidance - a profile on the autism spectrum. The public school environment was not simply a poor fit for him, it was harmful. The persistent overstimulation and accrued overwhelm of it sent him into autistic burnout for six months. During that time, my husband and I desperately navigated the unknown, researching, advocating, and searching for solutions we didn't yet know existed.

We found them and he now attends a home-based micro school, following a curriculum that meets all Rhode Island state guidelines. He is flourishing, exceeding expectations, and demonstrating mastery of concepts. Had H8531 been in effect during our most desperate months, my husband or I could have faced criminal charges or even jail, not for neglecting our son, but for trying to save him.

This bill fundamentally misunderstands why truancy happens. Truancy is a complex issue rooted in challenges such as neurodiversity, housing and financial instability, mental health crises, and others that no single punitive policy can address. This bill skips directly to punishment rather than asking the essential question: *why is this child not attending school?*

Rhode Island's current homeschooling laws are working as homeschool families are already held to clear, enforceable standards. This bill adds bureaucratic barriers and delays at exactly the

moment families are most vulnerable, treating dedicated parents as suspects rather than partners. Those delays are not neutral; they can cause direct, lasting harm to children.

I also want to raise serious concerns about the bill's language. Terms such as "competency," "capacity," and "best interest of the child" are used throughout without clear definitions or standards. Granting school committees broad subjective authority over these determinations, without consistent criteria or meaningful accountability, will lead to inequity and bias across districts. Vague language does not protect children, rather it creates confusion and opens the door to harm.

Finally, I must note that families like mine, those who homeschool, who have navigated truancy through necessity, who understand its real causes and real solutions, were not consulted in drafting this legislation. That is a critical omission. Legislation that affects our children this profoundly deserves input from the people living it.

My testimony illuminates just one reason a family may choose to homeschool. There are a multitude of others, such as gifted learners who need more than a traditional classroom can offer, children recovering from illness or trauma, cultural dynamics and related convictions, and more. I fear that this legislation was written with assumptions and stereotypes about who homeschool families are and why we make that choice. We are not a monolith, and we are not a problem to be solved. Any bill that attempts to regulate homeschooling must reckon with the full breadth and diversity of the community it affects.

I urge this committee to reject H8531 and instead pursue policies that seek to understand the root causes of truancy, acknowledge reasons for homeschooling interest, support struggling families, and treat homeschool parents as the committed partners they are. Families like mine are not the problem. We are proof that when the right solution is found in time, children thrive.

Respectfully submitted,

Emily Morash

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