

Dear Chairperson and Members of the Committee,

We are writing today on behalf of the Rhode Island Guild of Home Teachers (RIGHT). RIGHT is a 501(c)(3) homeschool group that has been supporting homeschoolers in RI since 1987. We would like to express our **unequivocal opposition to HB 8531**. While we respect the committee's dedication to student welfare, this legislation represents an unprecedented, unconstitutional, and deeply disruptive overreach into the fundamental rights of fit and protective parents.

If passed, HB 8531 will dismantle decades of successful, cooperative educational practice in Rhode Island by introducing vague, subjective criteria that strip parents of their authority and place an unmanageable administrative burden on local school districts.

We urge the committee to vote **INEXPEDIENT TO LEGISLATE** based on the following critical flaws:

1. Subversion of the "Best Interest" Standard & Parental Rights

HB 8531 grants local school committees the authority to deny or defer a family's homeschooling plan based on a vague determination of the "best interest of the child," alongside subjective assessments of a parent's "competency" or "capacity."

- Historically and legally, the "best interest" standard is reserved for state intervention in cases of proven abuse or neglect, or during custody disputes.
- This bill improperly flips the legal burden of proof, requiring fit parents to affirmatively prove their good faith and capability to the state, rather than requiring the state to prove educational neglect.

2. Disruptive Mandatory Public School "Detention"

The provision requiring a child to remain enrolled in a public school for up to 30 (or 45) school days while a local committee reviews a homeschooling plan is actively harmful to students.

- Families who choose to homeschool often do so to remove a child from an unsafe environment, severe bullying, or a situation failing to meet their mental or physical health needs.
- Forcing a child to remain in a detrimental environment for over a month while administrative gears turn is counterproductive and arbitrary. Furthermore, it creates immediate, unnecessary exposure to truancy traps for families transitioning in good faith.

3. Elimination of Vital Judicial Review

HB 8531 strips Rhode Island families of their right to independent judicial oversight. By routing all denials through an administrative appeal to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (RIDE) and explicitly labeling RIDE's decision as "final," this bill eliminates a family's access to traditional, independent court reviews. No bureaucratic agency should have the final, unreviewable word on a parent's right to direct their child's upbringing.

Conclusion

Rhode Island's current homeschooling framework functions smoothly, safely, and successfully. Homeschooled students across our state consistently thrive academically, socially, and emotionally under the dedicated care of their parents. HB 8531 solves no existing problem; instead, it creates a hostile, bureaucratic barrier between parents and their children's education.

On behalf of the thousands of homeschooling families across Rhode Island, we strongly urge this committee to protect parental rights and educational freedom by **voting NO on HB 8531**.

Respectfully submitted,

Jennifer Curry State Coordinator, RIGHT and **Andrea Edwards** Legislative Representative, RIGHT