

May 18, 2026

House Education Committee
Rhode Island General Assembly
Rhode Island State House

RE: Opposition to H8531

Chair and Members of the House Education Committee,

My name is Jessica Gomes, and I am submitting this written testimony in opposition to H8531.

I am a Rhode Island resident and a homeschool parent of a 14-year-old daughter. This is our third year homeschooling, and my daughter is thriving. Before homeschooling, she attended The Gordon School in East Providence. Our decision to homeschool was not made lightly. It was a thoughtful decision based on what we believed was best for her education, her development, and her overall well-being.

I believe parents should retain the right to choose the educational environment that best supports their child. Homeschooling is not a loophole. For many families, it is a responsible and intentional educational choice. Families choose homeschooling for many different reasons, including academic fit, learning style, values, safety, health, social concerns, sensory needs, bullying, or because the traditional school environment is simply not working for that child.

One of my concerns with H8531 is that it could make truancy or attendance-related issues a reason to deny or delay approval for at-home instruction. I understand that truancy and educational neglect are serious concerns. Children should be educated, and families should be accountable for making sure their children receive an education. However, not every child who struggles with attendance is delinquent, and not every parent facing attendance challenges is neglectful.

In many cases, attendance problems are a sign that the current educational environment is not working. A child may be dealing with bullying, anxiety, sensory issues, medical concerns, disability-related needs, safety concerns, or other barriers that make in-person school difficult or harmful. For those families, homeschooling may be the very resource that helps the child re-engage with learning. If truancy becomes a basis to deny or delay homeschool approval, the state may end up blocking one of the most practical solutions available to families.

I am also concerned about the deferral process in this bill. If a child is currently enrolled in public school, the bill appears to require that child to remain enrolled and attending school while the committee reviews the homeschool request, unless an exception is granted. For some children, that delay may not be harmless. If a family is seeking homeschooling because of bullying, emotional distress, sensory overload, safety concerns, or other serious barriers, requiring the

child to remain in that same environment during a deferral period could cause unnecessary mental, emotional, or even physical harm.

Another concern is the use of broad terms that are open to interpretation. The bill changes the section heading to include "Enforcement safeguards" and "Due process," but it does not clearly explain what due process will mean in practice for families. That gray area matters. When a law does not clearly define the process, families may be treated differently depending on the district, the committee, or the views of the person making the decision.

I have the same concern with the terms "competency" and "capacity" as they relate to homeschool instructors. Without clear and objective standards, those terms can be interpreted differently from one family to another. That creates room for inconsistency and bias, even if unintended. Families should not have their educational choices delayed or denied based on unclear standards or subjective judgments.

I also believe the financial impact on families should be considered carefully. This bill exists within a compulsory attendance framework that includes monetary fines and penalties. Strict enforcement tied to fines can place additional economic strain on families who may already be trying to solve a difficult educational problem for their child. Rhode Island is facing real budget pressures, and any enforcement structure that can generate revenue should be reviewed carefully to make sure it does not create unintended incentives that harm families or children.

I do not oppose accountability nor making sure children are educated. But I do oppose policies that make it harder for parents to choose an educational path that may be better suited to their child's needs. Homeschooling should remain a practical and accessible resource for families whose children are not thriving in a traditional school setting.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the committee to oppose H8531, or at minimum hold the bill for further study so that parents, homeschool families, disability advocates, and education stakeholders can be heard more fully.

Respectfully submitted,

Jessica Gomes
Rhode Island Resident
Homeschool Parent