

H88531 OPPOSED

Jessica Hebert

Warren, RI

Good evening and thank you for this opportunity. My name is Jessica Hebert. I am a mom of a newly turned 12 year old with special needs. I spent 15 years in various roles in special education and now work in a position that allows me to meet with hundreds of families a year and help them navigate the various special needs systems here in RI. And until this calendar year, I was Chair for my district's SELAC, Special Education Local Advisory Committee. I still sit on the RISEAC. I am also a domestic violence survivor. All of this experience matters. I am well versed in how the wording placed in laws can be interpreted and used for purposes they were not intended. And while I would love to discuss every proposed change to the current homeschooling law and how detrimental it will be for future homeschoolers, I will just share my story.

This is my first year homeschooling. Last school year, starting the week after February vacation until the last week of school, my son was out "sick" every other week. He had been placed in an out of district placement since 2022 after the public school made 11 separate calls to 911 for dysregulation and unsafe behaviors. At the time he was 8 and, prior to that special placement, he was academically a year ahead of his peers. When I pulled him out to homeschool, he was academically a year behind his peers. This was the decision and subsequent result of the "experts." Due to the placement he was in, truancy was not an issue for us, but had we stayed in public school, it would have been.

Last school year, my son was spending 40 plus hours a week in fight or flight mode. It was burning him out. Why? Because neither the public school, nor the out-of-district school staff were trauma informed and he was constantly triggered. Remember, these are some of the "experts" mentioned in the proposed changes. Today, after homeschooling for less than school year, he is on his way back to being academically ahead of his peers. He is not only regulated the majority of his every day life but actively has been able to apply coping skills we have been working on for years, independently. Why? Because I knew what my son needed better than the public school, better than the special school, and better than any law ever could.

I encourage you, elected officials, to understand you know what is best for your children and acknowledge that homeschoolers, like myself, know what is best for theirs. Keep the law out of decisions meant for family. As for truancy, stop trying to legislate what needs to be corrected by changing systems. Put education funding into the State Charter and allow the schools to start assisting the way it's needed: small class sizes, a livable wage for teachers and staff, actual support to make permanent change with support staff and services. Changing homeschool laws as proposed will only hurt those of us who know better than the systems you want to give authority over us to. My testimony matters. My son's experience matters. And I can tell you confidently, there are many, many, many more families like mine.