

**Subject:** Opposition to H8531

Dear Members of the House Education Committee,

I am writing as a Rhode Island parent who homeschools my child—as a mother who has made a thoughtful and informed decision about my child’s education. I respectfully urge you to oppose the proposed amendments in H8531, particularly those expanding district authority over approval of at-home instruction.

While I understand and support the goal of ensuring that all children receive a meaningful education, I am deeply concerned that this bill introduces unnecessary barriers for families who are already meeting that obligation effectively.

The proposed amendments would allow school committees to deny or defer approval of at-home instruction based on factors such as prior truancy petitions or a determination that a parent lacks “competency” or “capacity” to provide instruction. These provisions raise several concerns.

First, the language regarding parental “competency” and “capacity” is vague and undefined. While the bill authorizes the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to later define these standards through regulation, this ambiguity creates:

- potential for inconsistent or subjective decision-making across districts;
- lack of clarity regarding what would be required of homeschooling families;
- a deterrent effect for families from attempting to homeschool, even if it is in the best interest of their child and they would ultimately be approved.

It is also deeply problematic that it takes ultimate decision-making authority regarding a child’s education out of the hands of their parents.

Second, the emphasis on truancy as a disqualifying or delaying factor fails to recognize an important reality: in many cases, students struggle with attendance precisely because the traditional school environment is not meeting their needs. Treating prior truancy as a signal against homeschooling may prevent families from pursuing an educational model that could better support their child’s engagement and success.

Third, requiring children to remain enrolled and attending public school while a homeschooling request is under review places an additional burden on families who are actively trying to make a change in the best interest of their child. For some students, especially those experiencing stress, learning differences, or mismatched instruction, this requirement could be harmful rather than protective.

As a homeschooling parent, I can share that this educational path has been profoundly positive for my child and our family. My child benefits from an individualized approach that allows me to adapt instruction to their needs, pace, and interests. We are covering all subjects currently required by Rhode Island law and homeschooling allows us to incorporate travel, hands-on experiences, and real-world learning opportunities that are not possible within the traditional school schedule.

This flexibility is precisely what enables many children to thrive. Policies that make it more difficult for families to access homeschooling risk limiting those opportunities without clear evidence that such restrictions will improve outcomes.

I also believe it is important to step back and consider broader questions about how education can evolve to meet the needs of today's students. Many families turn to homeschooling not out of opposition to public education, but because they are seeking environments that are more responsive, personalized, and adaptable.

For these reasons, I urge the Committee to carefully consider whether the additional oversight and barriers introduced by H8531 are necessary or appropriate. Existing law already requires that homeschooled students receive instruction in core subjects and maintain attendance records. Strengthening enforcement at the expense of flexibility may do more harm than good.

Thank you for your time and for your commitment to Rhode Island's children and families. I respectfully ask that you oppose this bill or reconsider the provisions that would unnecessarily restrict access to at-home instruction.

Sincerely,

Jessica Walsh  
Parent