

To the House Education Committee,

My name is Mandi Leon, and I strongly oppose H8531.

I am the mother of a 13 year old son who attended public school before we made the decision to homeschool. We did not make that choice lightly. We first transferred him to a charter school because his public school environment had become unsafe, but unfortunately many of the same issues continued there.

Before fourth grade, all of his teachers loved him. He was a pleasure in class and he was thriving.

Students were bringing knives and pepper spray to school. My son's face was slammed into a wall, and I did not even receive a phone call from the school. Bullying was not properly addressed, and much of the school day was spent with teachers trying to control disruptive behavior instead of actually teaching.

The constant stress and lack of safety created severe anxiety for my son. Regular shelter in place drills, fears about school shootings, chaotic classrooms, and group punishments because of out of control students all contributed to an environment where he no longer felt safe, secure, or able to learn. He became so overwhelmed with anxiety that he was physically sick every morning before school. I also watched his behavior begin to change. He started acting out in school just like many of the other children around him. The environment was affecting not only his emotional health, but also the person he was becoming.

Homeschooling changed our lives.

For the past two years, my son has been thriving academically, emotionally, socially, and in terms of his overall well being. He participates in hands on learning experiences alongside his curriculum. He has developed hobbies, practical life skills, confidence, and strong friendships. Most importantly, his anxiety has disappeared. He is happy, engaged, and growing into a capable young man.

The language in this bill is vague and subjective, especially terms like competency, capacity, and best interest, and this opens the door to inconsistent decisions rather than clear and fair standards.

Rhode Island's current homeschool law is already working and does not need additional regulation. Existing child protection laws already apply to all families, including homeschool families. H8531 is deeply concerning because it gives school committees broad power to deny or delay homeschooling based on vague and subjective standards such as what they believe is in the best interest of a child or whether they personally believe a parent is competent enough to teach. That language is extremely open ended and gives government bodies too much discretion over families. Law abiding homeschool families should not face additional oversight because of isolated cases. Parents should remain the primary decision makers in their children's education.

This bill also forces children to remain in school while approval is pending, even in situations where the school environment may already be harming the child emotionally or physically. Families like mine should not be forced to continue exposing their children to environments that are failing them while waiting for government approval. Homeschooling has clearly benefited my child academically, emotionally, socially, and medically by removing severe anxiety and allowing him to thrive. Delays or added barriers to homeschooling can harm children who need immediate educational changes to stay safe and well. Families should not have to prove they are good enough to homeschool without clear evidence that there is a problem.

Rhode Island families already comply with homeschooling laws. Once the government is given the power to deny homeschooling based on subjective opinions, it creates a dangerous precedent that can lead to increasing restrictions and erosion of parental rights in the future.

Please oppose H8531 and protect homeschool freedom in Rhode Island.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Mandi Leon