

May 18, 2026

Representative Joseph McNamara
Chair, House Education Committee
Rhode Island Statehouse
Providence, RI 02903

Testimony in Opposition to House Bill 8531 - An Act Relating to Education - Compulsory Attendance

Dear Chairperson McNamara and members of the Education Committee,

My name is Melissa Robb and I am writing in opposition to H8531 as a veteran Rhode Island homeschool parent.

I am a secular homeschooler having homeschooled my child in Rhode Island from the very beginning of their education through high school graduation, and this August they will begin law school. Our experience is proof that Rhode Island's current homeschool law works.

H8531 would significantly change the current process by giving local school committees broad authority to delay, defer, or deny homeschooling requests based on vague and subjective standards such as "good faith," "capacity," "competency," and the "best interest of the child." These terms are not clearly defined, creating the potential for inconsistent and unfair decisions across districts. It would allow for the same parent to homeschool in one district and be refused in another. It would allow for one school committee to determine a parent is "worthy" to educate their child as they think best while another committee the next year could decide differently.

I am also concerned that issues related to truancy are being shifted onto school districts through the homeschool approval process. Rhode Island already has truancy laws and a truancy court system designed to address attendance concerns when they arise. Those existing legal processes should be sufficient, and school committees should not be placed in the position of investigating, judging, or denying homeschool requests based on subjective concerns about possible truancy. Mid-year withdrawals are usually a response to crisis, not truancy avoidance, and existing truancy systems already address concerns.

Rhode Island's current homeschool process already provides accountability while respecting parental rights. There is no demonstrated need for this level of increased oversight and discretion by local school committees.

As someone who has successfully homeschooled a child all the way to acceptance into law school, I respectfully urge the committee to oppose H8531.

Thank you for your time and the opportunity to speak against bill H8531.

Melissa Robb
Warwick, Rhode Island