



Home School Legal Defense Association

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Rhode Island House of Representatives
House Education Committee
82 Smith Street
Providence, Rhode Island 02903

Re: Testimony of the Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) in OPPOSITION to H. 8531

Truancy and chronic absenteeism are serious problems that deserve meaningful attention from lawmakers and school officials. But H.8531 rests on a faulty premise: that increasing regulations on homeschooling will meaningfully reduce absenteeism among public school students.

For decades, Rhode Island families have homeschooled by submitting a notice to their local school committee, which approves the program if it provides substantially equivalent instruction. There is no evidence that this process is responsible for Rhode Island’s rise in absenteeism.

On the contrary, a February 2026 report by the nonprofit, nonpartisan Rhode Island Public Expenditure Council found that chronic absenteeism is tied to broader challenges like poverty, housing instability, transportation difficulties, family stress, and student disengagement. Imposing more burdens on law-abiding homeschooling families will not solve these underlying problems.

H.8531 would also fundamentally change that process by allowing school committees to deny or defer homeschooling whenever they believe it is “not in the best interest of the child,” or whenever they question a parent’s “competency” or “capacity,” without meaningful standards or guardrails. These are legal determinations that school committees and officials are not equipped to make. Moreover, the United States Supreme Court has repeatedly recognized that the “best interest” standard is the wrong standard when a third-party is challenging a fit parent’s decisions.

Finally, H.8541 also imposes lengthy waiting periods on the exercise of a constitutional right, forces parents to prove their “good faith” and “capacity,” and treats proven, disputed, and disproven allegations alike—while denying families any meaningful judicial review. These are serious due process concerns.

Rhode Island unquestionably has an interest in addressing truancy and chronic absenteeism. But that interest must be pursued in ways that are narrowly tailored, evidence-based, and consistent with constitutional protections and due process. We urge the Committee to oppose H.8531.

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