

May 19, 2026

House Education Committee
Rhode Island General Assembly
Rhode Island State House
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

RE: Opposition to H8531 – Relating to Education and Compulsory Attendance

Chairman McNamara and Members of the House Education Committee,

I respectfully submit this testimony in opposition to H8531.

As a supporter of educational freedom and parental rights, I am deeply concerned that this bill would significantly undermine the ability of responsible Rhode Island families to homeschool their children without unnecessary government interference.

While the stated intent of the legislation may be to address truancy concerns, H8531 goes far beyond that purpose by granting broad discretionary authority to local school committees to deny or defer homeschool plans based on vague and subjective standards such as “capacity,” “competency,” or what officials believe is in the “best interest of the child.” These terms are not clearly defined in statute and create the potential for inconsistent, arbitrary, or discriminatory decision-making depending on the district or school committee involved.

For many homeschooling families, homeschooling is not a temporary alternative but a carefully chosen educational path that reflects the specific academic, medical, emotional, or developmental needs of their children. Families choose homeschooling for many valid reasons, including concerns about bullying, unsafe learning environments, special educational needs, mental health considerations, religious reasons, individualized learning styles, or dissatisfaction with academic performance in traditional schools.

Under H8531, parents could effectively be forced to seek permission from the same system that previously failed to meet their child’s needs. This fundamentally shifts homeschooling from a parental right to a privilege subject to government approval.

The bill is especially concerning because it appears to presume guilt or unfitness before any evidence of educational neglect exists. Families facing temporary attendance challenges, medical hardships, family crises, or disputes with school districts could find themselves blocked from homeschooling even when homeschooling would be the most stabilizing and beneficial option for the child.

Additionally, the bill provides limited due process protections. Families denied or deferred approval would only be permitted to appeal to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, whose decision would be considered final, with no clear judicial review process

available. This creates a troubling concentration of authority with insufficient safeguards for families.

Rhode Island has long maintained a balanced approach to homeschooling that protects both educational standards and parental rights. Thousands of homeschooled students across the state thrive academically, socially, and emotionally under the current framework. H8531 risks damaging that balance by creating barriers, uncertainty, and fear for law-abiding homeschool families who are providing excellent educational outcomes for their children.

Existing child welfare and truancy laws already provide mechanisms for intervention when genuine neglect or abuse occurs. Expanding bureaucratic control over every homeschooling family is neither a targeted nor effective solution.

I urge the committee to reject H8531 and instead support policies that preserve educational freedom, respect parental rights, and maintain Rhode Island's longstanding homeschool framework.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Rebecca Roberge
Coventry, Rhode Island