

ATTN: Lisa Cataldi, Clerk for the House Education Committee

Dear House Education Committee,

I am Samantha Seibert from Hope Valley, Representative District 38, and I oppose bill H8531. I attended the hearing today Tuesday May, 19th and would have liked to testify as a former teacher and current homeschool teacher and mom of 4 children. Unfortunately, the tardy start time of the committee made this impossible for me as I had 4 children needing to get home for bedtime. I do hope this statement will be considered instead.

The many families I heard spoke eloquently of the merits of homeschooling and showcased the dedication of parents, so I will refrain from repeating those in respect of your time. I'd like to focus on two points that did not get a lot of airtime or any at all.

The first being, in regards to protecting children, there is not a person present today that does not care deeply for the safety and wellbeing of all children. Changing homeschool law is unnecessary to keep RI children safe. The stories the magistrate shared are heartbreaking. However, the reality is that if she or any other administrator, teacher or adult ever suspects or is worried about child abuse and neglect, the only avenue for dealing with that is through reporting to DCYF. So for example if a family decides to homeschool for the purpose of evading truancy court oversight, and the magistrate or anyone else is worried about the child's welfare, that is a call to DCYF immediately. It is not an issue of needing more school oversight or school committee approval. It should be put into the hands of the organization designed and legally appropriate for investigating and attending to suspected child abuse and neglect. It does not matter whether a child is public, private or homeschooled, school committees are not meant for evaluating fitness of parents or child welfare. That is the sole role of DCYF and if this committee is worried about cases of abuse not being handled properly, then they should be putting their time and resources into bolstering the effectiveness of DCYF, not meddling in the laws of homeschool

My second point I did hear mentioned briefly, but which I would like to address again is in regards to families needing to seek approval from school committees. We are a secular family and all the homeschoolers I know have chosen to homeschool because their local public school could not meet the educational needs of their child. Many of these families have awful experiences within their local school and decided to homeschool out of a deep dedication to their children, many times at the sacrifice of their own career aspirations and sacrificing financially and in other ways to make homeschooling possible. Requiring families to ask permission from the entity that so badly failed their children already is harmful and unjust.

I think the representation tonight from homeschooled children and their families highlighted the excellence of both students' capabilities and the utter commitment of their parents.

I urge you to vote down this Bill and to go back to the drawing board to come up with more appropriate ways to actually make RI children safer through resourcing DCYF better. It could

also be a better use of time to demand our local public school districts to reflect and adjust their methods to meet the best practice standards of how we know kids learn so they can be more successful and maintain their enrollments.

Kindly,
Samantha Seibert