

My name is Tricia Harris, and I am the parent of an 11-year-old homeschooled child with significant medical and neurological disabilities. I am submitting this testimony in opposition to bill H8531 because homeschooling has been life-changing for my son, and Rhode Island's current homeschool law is already working.

My son has a life-threatening medical condition that caused a brain injury resulting in multiple disabilities, including hemiparesis, autism spectrum disorder, ADHD, cortical visual impairment, auditory sensory disorder, sensory processing disorder, and seizure risk. These disabilities significantly affect the way he learns, processes information, and interacts with the world around him.

When my son attended public integrated preschool, he struggled tremendously. Because of his visual and auditory processing disabilities, he required substantial support just to follow along in a classroom environment. Socially, he also faced major barriers. Due to face blindness and auditory processing difficulties, he could not independently recognize or follow peer interactions without consistent adult support. The traditional school environment was overwhelming, isolating, and ineffective for him academically and emotionally.

Homeschooling has allowed my son to thrive in ways that once seemed impossible. Academically, he is now successfully completing 5th grade work at age 11. Emotionally, he is more confident, regulated, and eager to learn. Socially, he has built meaningful friendships and participates actively in the homeschool community.

Through homeschooling, he participates in weekly co-op classes, book presentations with friends, an international fair, a state fair, Scouts, and Dungeons & Dragons groups with other homeschool children. These activities allow him to socialize in supportive environments that accommodate his disabilities while still giving him the opportunity to build friendships and independence.

Our family is incredibly grateful to have the ability to choose the educational environment that best meets our child's unique needs. Every family should continue to have the right to make those decisions for their own children.

This bill is especially concerning because it relies on vague and subjective terms such as "competency," "capacity," and "best interest."

For children like my son, delays or additional barriers to homeschooling could cause real harm. Families sometimes need to make immediate educational changes when a school setting is failing to meet a child's medical, emotional, or educational needs and this bill would force extended waiting periods.

Homeschooling gave my son access to an education that truly works for him. It gave him confidence, friendships, emotional stability, and the ability to succeed academically despite profound challenges. I urge you to protect the rights of Rhode Island families to continue making the educational choices that best serve their children and oppose this bill.

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