

To: Representative Joseph M. McNamara and House Education Committee

RE: House Bill H8531

Position: OPPOSE

Submitted: May 18, 2026

Hi, my name is Vichara Santos Silva, and I am a parent who has been homeschooling my four children for over seven years. I am writing in strong opposition to bill H8531.

Homeschooling has allowed my children to truly thrive. Our days are filled with meaningful learning experiences that go far beyond worksheets and standardized expectations. We spend our mornings focused on language arts and math, which they complete at their personal level, and our afternoons learning through projects, enrichment activities, field trips, exploration, community involvement, and real-world experiences.

We cook meals together, work on projects and do book studies, and travel to learn firsthand about the world around us. Most recently, we took a trip to Canada, where we practiced our French, learned about a new country, its history and culture, and visited museums to learn about science, technology, the ecosystems, and different plants and animals. These experiences are education for our children.

Our homeschool community is deeply involved and connected. We attend a weekly co-op where parents teach classes based on their strengths and passions. I teach cooking classes, and even get our teenagers to help prepare lunches for families each week. Through our co-op and activities, my children have had opportunities to participate in theater, debate, Dungeons & Dragons clubs, stop-motion classes, talent shows, science fairs, book clubs, and more. They are not isolated, but they are engaged, social, creative, and connected to people of all ages.

Outside of homeschooling, my children participate in soccer, dance, and Girl Scouts, just to name a few. Through Girl Scouts and our coop, they have helped build and stock a community food pantry and brought joy to our local nursing homes. They are learning not only academics, but leadership, compassion, confidence, and service to others.

Homeschooling has also allowed me to meet each child where they are individually. Some of my children are naturally more timid and would have struggled deeply in a rigid full-day school

environment at age five. They would most likely have an accident before asking their teacher permission to go to the bathroom. Homeschooling has allowed us to gently build their confidence over time. Today, those same children have auditioned for productions, performed in talent shows, and even served as MCs in front of large groups.

My children are able to move at the pace that is right for them. If one child is advanced in a subject, we can challenge them further. If another child is struggling, we can slow down and give them the support they need immediately. That flexibility is one of the greatest strengths of homeschooling.

One of my biggest concerns with H8531 is the vague and subjective language surrounding whether parents are considered “fit” or “qualified” to homeschool. Families should not have to prove they deserve permission to educate their own children at home. This bill places enormous power into the hands of the government to determine which families are acceptable, without clear standards and without a right to appeal to a court.

I am also deeply concerned about the requirement that children remain enrolled in public school while approval is pending. My children have never attended school full time. Being suddenly forced into this new environment and long school day would be an emotional shock and major disruption to their lives, routines, and education.

Rhode Island’s education system is already struggling, with many students and schools not meeting proficiency standards. I am more confident in my ability to prepare my children for the real world and college than any of our local schools. We are not the problem that needs fixing. Many of us are working tirelessly to give our children individualized, meaningful education while also contributing positively to our communities.

I ask you to please consider the real families behind this bill. Homeschooling is not neglect. It is not avoidance. For many of us, it is an intentional, deeply committed way of raising and educating our children.

Please oppose H8531 and protect the rights of Rhode Island families to continue educating their children in the ways that best meet their needs.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Vichara Santos Silva