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### Vote against bill H8531

Twenty years ago, I arrived in this country from Ukraine, a daughter of a school superintendent, carrying a deep reverence for the power of education. When I became a teacher myself, my heart was filled with gratitude for America. I fell in love with a beautiful, defining truth of this nation: the profound freedom given to parents to choose how to guard and guide their children's minds—whether through public, private, online, or home schooling.

Then, four years ago, the full invasion of my homeland tore my world apart.

As Russian bombs shattered her city, my sister was forced to flee for her life, clutching her preteen daughter. They sought refuge in Germany, but instead of finding peace, they encountered a rigid educational system that inflicted a different kind of trauma. My niece, speaking no German, begged to continue her Ukrainian education online—to cling to the familiar sounds of her native tongue while her world burned. Instead, the law forced her into a German middle school. Isolated by a language barrier, unable to understand a single lesson, and denied the right to learn in her own language, my bright niece sank into a severe, devastating and dark depression.

Please, I beg you, do not repeat these tragic mistakes. Do not let bureaucracy blind us to the fragile souls of children. Please protect the sacred freedom of parents to choose what is best for the children they love.

I understand that there are some high-profile cases of severe child abuse and tragic fatalities—where children were pulled from public schools ostensibly to be homeschooled—spurred you to reform its regulations. But look for example into Eve Rogers's case. Her family was under an active Department of Children and Families (DCF) investigation at the time of her death. In other words, **DCF failed Eve Rogers.** DCF failed a lot of other children as well.

Bullying in schools is a critical issue affecting roughly 1 in 4 students, causing severe, lasting, or even fatal consequences. Especially cyberbullying. Affected students often suffer from anxiety, depression, dropping grades, and a fear-driven school avoidance that can lead to dropout.

So, again, I beg you not to punish homeschooling families because DCF failed Eve Rogers and other children. Please protect the sacred freedom of parents to choose what is best for the children they love.

5-19-2026