

I am a lifelong Marylander. My husband and I have homeschooled our children for the past nine years. We love homeschooling and we appreciate that the Maryland homeschool laws are written in a way that allows us to teach our children the way they learn best. There is accountability in the law, but also freedom to choose the curriculum and methods that we as the parents think are best. This freedom has allowed our children to thrive in our homeschool.

We also appreciate the fact that homeschoolers are not a monolithic group. Our families do not all look the same. We do not practice the same religions. We sit on different sides of the political aisle. We have different reasons for homeschooling and a variety of different priorities for what we teach our children. We use different methods for teaching. This is GOOD. Right now, if homeschoolers want to petition our government, we do it by contacting our legislators directly. This also is good because it allows each family to speak for itself. Each can express its own thoughts and concerns about pending legislation or issues pertinent to homeschooling.

My concern with HB 832 is that it creates a small group of people tasked with representing all homeschoolers in Maryland. Homeschool families would have no say in selecting the people who sit on this "advisory council" even though they would purport to represent us. According to the bill, these members are to "represent the diversity of homeschool families that exist throughout the state," but this is a fool's errand - how could you ever find a group to truly represent all the different types of homeschooling families and all the various needs of all the different children homeschooled in Maryland? It is not hard to see that this "advisory council" would quickly become a political tool, with various subsets of homeschoolers vying for a seat at the table. It would create conflict and strife where it need not be. (Sadly, it is already creating unnecessary conflict in the Maryland homeschool community.)

Ultimately, my reason for opposing this bill is that it is completely unnecessary. Homeschoolers do not need an advisory council to represent us. When we have an issue or concern, we are well equipped to represent ourselves to our legislators directly. This is how it has worked for years, and it works quite well. We do not need an advisory council to "gather information on the needs of homeschool parents" (text of the bill); instead, as homeschool parents we can contact our representatives directly to express our needs. We do not need an advisory council to "advise the state superintendent, the state board, the general assembly, and the governor on matters relating to homeschooling" (text of the bill); again, we are quite capable of advising them ourselves, much the way I am right now by sending you this email.

If you want to know what homeschoolers in Maryland really need, it is this: to be left alone to continue homeschooling the way we have for years without undo and unnecessary interference from even well-meaning legislators/bills.

I'm sure you've heard the adage, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." It applies well to this bill. As such, I am asking you to please oppose HB 832.