

My name is Alyssa Andrews, and I homeschool my four children in Wicomico County. I strongly oppose HB 832 and ask you, on behalf of my family, to oppose this bill.

First, I would like to focus on what our great state of Maryland gets right. Under current homeschooling laws, Maryland strikes a wonderful balance between ensuring the consistent education of its homeschooled children while respecting the individualized educational choices of each and every family. I am a Catholic, and here in this great state I am surrounded by resources that allow me to pursue a rich academic, religious, and cultural tradition spanning over 2000 years. Catholics, people of other faiths, and all people of good will are free to pursue educational opportunities that support their unique philosophical, religious, and cultural traditions in Maryland. At the same time, my children are diligently monitored by an umbrella organization to ensure that they are being provided what every child deserves—an ongoing and consistent education that includes 8 critical subjects—mathematics, English, science, social studies, physical education, health, music, and art. This ensures that the state's interest in their education—my children's formation as citizens—is met. This wonderful balance makes Maryland a great place to homeschool, and has helped foster thriving homeschooling families across our great state.

Now, on to my objections to HB 832, which would create a new homeschool advisory committee within the department of education. First, If I need resources, connections, or guidance, I turn to the plethora of private resources easily available to me as opposed to the state department of education. As I am sure you are aware, the challenges facing public education are immense. As many as one third of the state superintendents are leaving their posts according to the Baltimore Sun, a majority of teachers are considering leaving the profession earlier than they anticipated according to the largest national teachers organization, public school enrollment numbers have dramatically decreased over the past 2 years leading to serious financial concerns in many districts, and students across the state who have faced 18 plus months of educational instability due to school closures are suffering from incredible learning loss that will undoubtedly affect them for the rest of their lives—just to name a few. Thanks to homeschooling, my children have experienced exactly zero of these things. They are thriving because I, their mother, represent their interests.

This brings me to my 2nd objection, That this bill proposes to shift my representation to one unelected committee member representing me. Not only me and my children, but all Salisbury homeschoolers, all Wicomico County homeschoolers, and indeed all homeschoolers on the entire Eastern Shore. That's one unelected individual who will supposedly be able to speak for 9 counties worth of homeschoolers. The population based committee member breakdown suggested in this bill will threaten to eclipse the wishes of spread out and rural homeschool communities like those on the Eastern Shore. In addition, the political appointment model as proposed in this bill all but ensures that appointments will boil down to who you are and who you know. That will hardly represents me, an average homeschool mom working hard day in and day out to teach phonograms like 4 letter "ay" (that's e-i-g-h), to break down rate problems, or to discuss why the Pilgrims continue to be a good example to us (their great courage to pursue freedom in the face of many hardships and their commitment to a time of thanksgiving). Instead of being eclipsed by someone claiming to represent me, I prefer to represent myself, as I am doing today. Current Maryland homeschooling laws recognize this and allow me and many other homeschooling families to represent our own unique interests.

Third, it is obvious to me that the way this bill was created and proposed is evidence that it will do the opposite of what it intends—which is to somehow increase MSDE transparency and increase homeschoolers influence. This bill has been met with tremendous opposition from homeschooling families and advocacy groups across the state. Many have asked for information on what problem this bill is supposed to be addressing, and who or what organizations lobbied in support of the creation of this bill. These legitimate questions have been largely ignored. So here in the proposal of the bill lies the big problem—a small group of people with influence can claim to speak for the wider homeschool community without our support, and we have no way of knowing how it came to be because that information is kept behind closed doors. At last check, there were over forty thousand homeschooled children in this state. A select few from one particular group do not represent all forty thousand of our children.

For all of these reasons, this bill is a threat to my children and my family. Please allow us to continue to thrive as homeschoolers by opposing the creation of this committee, and instead spend your time addressing the many problems facing the public school system.