

Ways and Means Committee
Hearing Date 3/3/22
HB832 - FAVORABLE

Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Washington, and the Members of the Ways and Means Committee;

I'm writing in **support** of HB832, regarding the establishment of a Homeschool Advisory Council. Please give HB832 a **Favorable** Report.

What and Why

HB832 would result in the creation of a homeschool advisory council. This advisory council wouldn't have any voting power at all. It would overwhelmingly consist of homeschoolers, who would communicate with the homeschoolers throughout the state about what they do and don't want, such as:

- *Participation in public school sports.
- *Participation in other public school extracurricular activities.
- *Access to therapies in public schools (such as speech therapy).
- *No changes at all.

All of these things could then be communicated to the Department of Education, and conversations could take place.

As things are now, there is no direct communication between homeschoolers and the Department of Education. There have been some meetings between "interested parties" and the Dept. of Ed., however those "interested parties" that were invited were not actively homeschooling and did not represent the diversity of homeschoolers in Maryland. **Homeschoolers have not been told that changes to homeschool regulations were being considered, or even that they had taken place.** This council would change that, and provide transparency to the process.

This council wouldn't be like a school board, since it wouldn't have any voting power, but more like the PTA or parents who show up to Board of Education meetings. Ideally, it would have some measure of influence over homeschool requirements. At the very least, homeschoolers would be informed of changes.

Assessing Homeschooling Interests

I've been homeschooling since 2007, and have been very involved in the homeschooling community that entire time. In 2011, I started a Facebook group for homeschoolers in Maryland. It's the largest Facebook group for Maryland homeschoolers, and currently has **13,700** members.

Over the past 11 years of the group's existence, there have been a considerable number of posts about the **desire for homeschoolers to have a say in homeschool policies.**

There have also been an **overwhelming number of posts expressing confusion about homeschool regulations.**

Some regulations are contradictory in nature, while others are so broadly stated that different homeschool reviewers (people employed by the county to verify that homeschoolers are meeting teaching requirements) interpret them differently - sometimes even within the same county.

A homeschool advisory council could at least have these conversations with the Department of Education. It could result in clarification in the regulations, so that homeschoolers don't become stressed out and feel the need to pay groups like the right-wing, anti-LGBTQ HSLDA (\$130/ year) or homeschool umbrellas (costs range from \$50/ year through hundreds of dollars/ year) to relieve them of the stressful engagements.

We Can't Do It Ourselves

There are many concerns among homeschoolers that could be voiced by a homeschool advisory council. While some people argue that homeschoolers could create our own advocacy organizations, the fact is that we're extremely busy with homeschooling our children. Many homeschoolers have children with disabilities. Some homeschoolers work from home (often providing childcare, or teaching online classes), and some

homeschoolers work out of the home. Some homeschoolers are single parents. Most homeschoolers don't know anything about organizing and advocating.

It's especially difficult when we're not even educated about who to advocate to, how, or when. And, of course, we don't have access to contact information for all the other homeschoolers in the state in order to organize.

It was homeschoolers who worked on the idea of a homeschool advisory council. Unlike the other homeschooling-related legislation that I've seen introduced this session, **homeschoolers had a say in creating this piece of legislation.**

Dispelling the Myth

The people who have been so outspoken against the advisory council have mostly been those who are happy to pay the HSLDA money. Note that the HSLDA is extremely partisan and has a history of bigotry. **Most homeschoolers don't subscribe to the HSLDA.** The stereotype of homeschooling only being a thing that conservative Christians do is very inaccurate. My homeschooling friends aren't to the right of moderate, and most are progressive or radical left.

There are homeschooling posts about how to teach accurate history and comprehensive sex ed. My own homeschooling Facebook group doesn't even allow advertisements for the HSLDA, or any amount of racism, homophobia, transphobia, xenophobia, or other forms of bigotry, and yet it's hugely populated.

So many people are secular homeschoolers, and are not homeschooling in order to avoid facts or people who are different from them. I've belonged to numerous homeschool co-ops that were intentionally welcoming, as opposed to "Christian-only" (which usually means conservative Christian.) The HSLDA and the homeschoolers who automatically think that anything that originates from Democrats must be evil **DO NOT SPEAK FOR US.**

Delegate Arikan - Conflict of Interest?

I'm personally also very concerned about Delegate Arikan's participation in opposing HB832, since she runs a homeschool umbrella and **makes money off of homeschoolers' fears**. A homeschool advisory council would make people less fearful of change because we'd have the opportunity to be proactive, rather than reactive. Less fear means less money going to homeschool umbrellas. I believe that Del. Arikan has a conflict of interest in relation to this and other homeschool-related bills, most of which would impact her wallet for better or worse.

For all of these reasons, I urge you to give a Favorable Report for HB832. Thank you for your consideration of this matter.

Sincerely,
Debi Jasen
Pasadena, MD