

Hello,

I have become aware of Delegate Ruth's certainly well-intentioned, but unfortunate efforts in HB0832. The bill, which intends to create a homeschool oversight advisory council, is laudable in its intent; unfortunately the bill has several issues that make its advancement untenable at present. Below are several specific issues with the proposal:

- 1) The bill has not been given adequate public attention, time, or deliberation. The bill would affect the way all homeschooling families in the state operate, yet it has not been made public for discussion, nor have any alternatives to the formation of an oversight council been discussed. The timeline of this bill, having been first read and introduced on February 3rd of 2022, is too short to have had a meaningful discussion or any input from those it would affect.
- 2) The bill is not the desire of homeschooling families. While the bill discusses the need for inclusiveness in its language it is important to note that the target demographic of the bill, homeschooling families, have been left out of the discussion when the bill was drafted. Delegate Ruth has received numerous calls to rescind her bill, but refuses to listen to her constituents and leaves us out of the conversation. The needs of our children, understood most intimately by their primary caregivers and educators, are being ignored. Disability activists have often repeated the mantra, "Nothing about us without us" as a reminder that their voices must be involved in the drafting and amendment of any legislation about them. Why would this not apply to homeschooling?
- 3) The bill laudably sets the requirement that members of the advisory and oversight committee would include homeschooling veterans, as well as parents who've homeschooled gifted and children with special needs. Unfortunately, the council is not an autonomous advocacy group of homeschooling parents – it is a Maryland State Department of Education council which happens to include homeschooling parents. Reducing the voices of homeschooling parents to a select few representatives who would themselves be beholden to the MSDE will certainly result in silencing our voices and limiting our abilities to advocate for those under our care.
- 4) The bill is easily used to abuse the rights of homeschooling families. As the bill proposes an advisory council which is answerable to MSDE and not homeschooling families, outside groups could leverage their political and social capital to marginalize homeschooling rights. As anyone could bring concerns to this council, which must answer to the MSDE, teachers unions, anti-homeschooling legislators, and bad actors could easily use the advisory council to swamp homeschooling families with false or unfounded concerns. Homeschooling families would not have the time or resources to combat this lawfare, especially when only the advisory council would have a voice with the MSDE.

Simply put, although this bill is well-intentioned, it takes the delicate situation that is homeschooling in Maryland and opens it up to abuse while silencing homeschooling parents' voices. The bill is not the will of homeschooling families, and the sponsor of the bill will not withdraw it despite being clearly informed of this by her constituents. Better alternatives exist, such as increased tools to directly reach the MSDE by homeschooling families without the need for oversight committees, or simply having annual or quarterly open meetings between homeschooling families and the MSDE. These alternatives would serve the aims of this bill much better, and without the ripe potential for abuse that HB0832 presents. I hope you will listen to the will of your constituents and reject the bill in its entirety.