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Respected Delegates and Committee Members:

I am writing today regarding HB0832, Education - Maryland Homeschool Advisory Council – Establishment, a bill submitted by Delegate Ruth.

As a parent who has had a child in the public school system here in Maryland, as well as a current homeschool parent, I have seen both sides of what is available. As such, I have many grave concerns regarding this bill. I have heard the various perspectives and opinions of those involved with the bill creation, as well as those against it. After review of the bill itself, in conjunction with well rounded discussion in our amazing homeschool community, our family has firmly decided we (along with the vast majority of homeschooling families we have spoken with) are against HB0832.

Per the bill, the purpose is “... to gather information on the needs of homeschool parents and homeschool umbrella schools and advise the State Superintendent of Schools, the State Board of Education, the General Assembly, and the Governor on matters relating to homeschooling..”

There is no need for a council to do this. Should our county or the MSDE or whomever want to know something, all they have to do is send an email, letter, survey or call us via the county or through the umbrella groups. We are right here and can be reached. Just use the current channels to do so.

There is something you may not be aware of, but homeschool families are awesome, diverse and very capable of speaking up and fighting for what we believe in. We have chosen this path for our families because it is the best option for our children. I am not here to bash public schools, or even private school options. But for many of us, neither of those options are the best for our children. In Maryland we have the freedom to make this choice, to determine how to teach our child best, and what to teach our child, determine when they are ready to learn something, or maybe they are not mature enough or have enough cognitive understanding to tackle something just yet. Because we homeschool, we get to cater to the needs of our children so they can thrive. And thrive they do!

When we need help, we have a whole community of other homeschoolers available to help us.  
When we need advice, we have a whole community of homeschoolers available to help us.  
We have a whole community of homeschoolers able to help us.  
**WE ARE A COMMUNITY, AND A STRONG ONE AT THAT.**

While the concept of an advisory council may appear on the surface to be an idea to consider, the bottom line is we, the homeschooling community, do not need one. We have each other. When things come to light, we as a community join together and make our voices heard.

We should stop there, because there really is no purpose of a council, therefore, no need for this bill at all. However, putting that aside, let's continue through this bill. The members of the reported council to be...

- \*a State Superintendent or designee

- \*a Secretary of higher Education or designee

- \* 2 individuals EMPLOYED through a local education agency appointment by the State Superintendent

- \* Speaker of the House appoints 2 members – one employed by a homeschool umbrella and one veteran homeschool parent who has educated a child to high school completion

- \* President of the Senate appoints 2 members – one employed by a homeschool umbrella and one veteran homeschool parent who has educated a child to high school completion

- \* 8 Members selected by the council – one who homeschooled a special needs child, and the rest are given representation by grouping counties together

So let's talk about this for a moment. So the council, who reportedly will represent us homeschooling families, will be represented by 8 government/political appointments and 8 others "individuals" - 7 from various county groups and one who homeschooled a special need child. They are also all political appointments in one form or another. Then, the "individuals" are grouped together by various counties, which is largely confusing. Baltimore City, Baltimore County and Harford County are to be represented by 1 "individual" but the needs in those 3 areas are vastly different. This group of people is in no way a fair representation of the homeschooling community in Maryland.

Then I find this requirement to be interesting..."Represent The Diversity Of Homeschool Families That Exist Throughout The State, Including Diversity Of Homeschool Philosophy, Age, Religion, Race, Ethnicity, Sexual Orientation, And Gender Identity;"

What exactly does that mean. Our families do not represent our own diversity etc? Our homeschool community is very diverse in many forms. But choosing members of a council that have to include a check box is discriminatory and unnecessary. If there were a council, which again I do not believe is necessary at all, then members should be elected by fellow homeschoolers. Not by meeting a check box or by political appointment. You will never acquire equity and fair representation appointing members, and in order to adhere to the check boxes you would have to require homeschooling members to respond as to their age, religion, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and gender identity, political affiliation among other things. You would then use that information, thus discriminating against others by choosing members based on that information. All that does is create division and possibly may even exclude an excellent home school advocate who declines to answer such questions, or doesn't check the "right" boxes. Further, there are so many variations even within one subsect. For example, a Jewish homeschooling family may be very could be a variety of ethnic or racial backgrounds, and hold a variety of religious and philosophical beliefs. Further, political positions on a political board also would need to be taken into consideration. **The only way to adequately**

**represent each Jewish homeschooling family (or any homeschooling family), is to allow them to represent themselves. We already do this however, and therefore do not need a council to represent us.**

But let's move on, so this council has now been politically appointed and served its term. Now the council replacements are to be selected by the current council. So if the first council of political appointments and individuals do not represent the vast majority of homeschooling families, the likelihood of future councils looks bleak to being truly diverse and fairly representative of all the homeschooling families.

Is standing up for my family not sufficient? Is my voice not important that I need a council to, maybe, speak up for me (if they happen to agree with what I even think)? To say we need a council to represent diversity is frankly absurd. There is no way a council can equally represent every variation of homeschooling family. And the mere fact that positions are appointment by politicians, and then replacements by council members, is a sure fire way to make sure every homeschool family, even the majority of them, are NOT represented. And again, what is there a need to represent?

And again, the end of the bill goes back to the point is to "gather information on the needs of homeschool parents and homeschool umbrellas schools in the state." What information are you needing? Have you ever asked us before you presumed we needed to wanted a council to ask us or find out?

What I find so interesting, is this bill was proposed, but no one ever reached out to my family to ask for information. Calls to Delegate Ruth have gone unanswered. I did get an auto response to my email, but not real genuine response. If Delegate Ruth and/or whomever was behind this bill was so interested, or felt there was a need, why was the homeschooling community not fully consulted? Why were umbrella leaders not consulted? Why did you not ask the county representatives to reach out or send an email regarding whatever questions you may have?

We have a path to get answers we need. We have county and/or umbrella contacts. We have delegates and representatives. We have our OWN voices.

Should our county have questions about homeschooling needs, they have our contact information and can email us a survey, or reach out during our reviews. My reviewer always asks if there are questions or areas we are struggling in. They are very helpful and willing to offer suggestions when they hear good ideas from other homeschoolers, and help share those ideas (even though we often do this within our community ourselves). The county or MSDE can reach out to the umbrellas and ask them to survey their members if a specific topic is of interest. But even at that, we are a community that can and will speak up when we need to be heard. If we want, or don't want, something, we will let our voices be heard.

There is no benefit whatsoever to having an advisory council. And any perceived benefit will quickly be foregone with politics as usual with appointments and ensuring seats are only given to certain people with certain views, likely alienating a large portion of families, and no recourse to get proper representation of those families.

Maryland has great homeschooling regulations with a fair balance of freedom and oversight. Our families are thriving, our kids are thriving, and adding more bureaucracy when there is no need is the highlight of misuse of funds and time and energy. We don't want anything, especially when there are strings attached (as in other pending bills).

Please leave homeschooling families be. We are not bothering anyone. We want to continue educate our families as we see fit. We have been for generations and will continue to do for generations more. We will continue to speak up and rise up as needed. If you truly want to know the needs and/or desires of the homeschooling community, or have questions for us, you already have methods to obtain this information through the current set up and process through county and umbrella representatives. Why create another way, when you already have one that exists that works just fine.

Thank you for your time.

*Beth Blander*

Sincerely,

Beth Blander