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Thursday, March 3, 2022

HB0832 HEARING: OPPOSED

Ways & Means Committee
Honorable Chair Delegate Vanessa E. Atterbeary, Vice Chair Delegate Alonzo T.
Washington, Members of the Committee

I submit this testimony on **HB0832** requesting that you vote **OPPOSED**.

As a homeschool parent for the past ten years, several questions occurred to me as I read this bill: Why is this Council necessary? Why would this Council be appointed rather than elected by the homeschooling community it is supposedly being set up to serve? How would this small, appointed Council be representative of the many diverse interests of Maryland's thousands of homeschooling families? How would this Council better represent the interests of homeschooling families than they already do themselves? Why should taxpayer money be spent on this Council when homeschooling families are already adequately regulated by the state and have an existing avenue for their concerns to be addressed?

Families who choose to homeschool their children each have their individual reasons for doing so. Homeschooling parents realize that each of their children is different with unique talents, interests, skills, abilities, learning styles, and goals. It is their right to choose the curricula and teaching methods best suited to their children's academic, social, emotional, and religious needs. Because the homeschool community is so diverse, a Council could never adequately or fairly represent all of its members' interests. This particular proposal calls for a very small Council of government officials and their chosen appointees to represent the homeschooling community at large. There is absolutely no democratic process involved; nor is there any mechanism to hold Councilmembers accountable to the homeschooling families they would purportedly represent. As such, this legislation appears to be nothing more than a bald-faced power grab by a small group of self-designated homeschool family representatives to push their own personal and political agendas onto the rest of the community while forcing taxpayers to foot the bill. By passing this bill, the state legislature would be giving this small group of unelected individuals the color of authority to speak on behalf of the entire homeschooling community.

Although the reasons given by Delegate Sheila Ruth for the necessity of this proposed Council – to survey parents on whether homeschooled students should be able to participate in public school sports and extracurricular activities or whether they should be eligible for scholarships – appear innocuous, the Council could easily be used to drive more nefarious political agendas. The issues the delegate claims to be concerned about are easily resolved without more government bureaucracy or oversight of homeschooling families. Moreover, these examples serve only to highlight another of the major problems with this bill: the topics over which this Council would have the power to advise the Governor and legislature on behalf of

homeschooling families remain completely undefined. Such sweeping power should not be put in the hands of a few unelected individuals as their interests and agendas may not align with those of the people they were appointed to represent. Accordingly, the danger that this unelected Council will push a political agenda that goes against the interests of the very people they proclaim to represent far outweighs any alleged benefit to the homeschooling community.

It must be noted that a public discussion of the bill was hosted by the Arundel Homeschoolers Support Group on February 22, 2022 via Zoom. It is unclear why Delegate Ruth was not invited to explain her bill and answer questions regarding it. Rather, Alessa Keener spoke in favor of the bill. During the discussion, Keener stated that any benefits or drawbacks of the bill/Council were 'speculative.' If there is no concrete articulable benefit to the establishment of this Council, why has it been proposed? Keener also said that the Council would not have access to the private email addresses or contact information for homeschooling families. How would the Council achieve its stated purpose of conducting surveys if it does not have access to contact information? Yet again, it appears that this bill is not only ill conceived, but simply a guise for a small group of partisans to gain power over and act on behalf of the entire homeschooling community. This Council of self-designated representatives is not needed or wanted by the broader homeschooling community. We are perfectly capable of speaking for ourselves should concerns arise.

During the public discussion, Keener further stated the intent of the bill was to open the legislative processes surrounding homeschooling up to a wider spectrum of voices. The proposed bill does the opposite. It concentrates power in a small group of government officials and their hand-picked representatives from the homeschooling community who would be given the color of authority to speak on behalf of all Maryland homeschoolers. If the goal really is to include more voices, the solution is simple: Open the quarterly meetings up to all homeschooling families so that those interested in attending and having their voices heard have the opportunity to do so. An unelected Council is not only unnecessary but, contraindicated for this stated goal.

In conclusion, there is no need to waste taxpayer money on this Council. Homeschooling parents are perfectly capable of speaking for themselves and using the resources already in place – county officials and homeschooling umbrella groups- to have their questions answered and concerns met. This bill would concentrate power in a small group of unelected officials; thereby suppressing the voices of the vast majority of homeschooling families. I am adamantly **OPPOSED** to this attempted government overreach and urge you to vote against this bill.