

I submit this written testimony to express my concerns about and **opposition** to **H.B. 832**.

Instead, I ask that you please respect homeschooling parents, programs, umbrellas, and the like, by retaining and safeguarding the liberty of homeschooling families and avoiding gratuitous intervention/regulation.

This bill—introduced **less than one month ago** on Feb. 3, 2022, and **being rushed to vote** before the end of this session **without** the idea of a Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) Homeschool Advisory Council ever being offered for discussion within the homeschool community— if passed **would materially suppress the voice and impose upon the freedom of homeschooling families in Maryland**.

Why is H.B. 832 being rushed to a vote this session when the idea of a council arose out of the blue less than one month ago? This does not inspire confidence in the motives behind its proposal.

Besides the fact that H.B. 832 would create a quasi-official source for information on homeschooling that would interfere with or impede effectiveness of homeschool groups and individual advocates, a council created to look into the needs of homeschool students will enable ANYONE (teachers-union representatives, school-board members, adversarial state legislators, and countless others who believe homeschooling does NOT meet the needs of homeschooled children) to bring their recommendations, suggestions, proposals, concerns, complaints, petitions, etc. to the council. This is one of the many unintended, potentially harmful and negative consequences that could easily and predictably result from an established MSDE Homeschool Advisory Council.

Additionally, the bill will make it far too easy for the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) to choose to ignore all the voices of homeschoolers **except** those of the *council*; and, as the council would be an **appointed rather than representative** one, there will NO accountability to the homeschool community whatsoever.

It is NOT required to be transparent with or accessible to homeschoolers beyond the open meeting laws of the state, neither do homeschoolers have any veto power over council actions or decisions, including the removal of council members whose actions encroach upon and, or jeopardize homeschooling freedoms.

Moreover, H.B. 832 contains NO language that compels MSDE to engage with council members in good faith with full transparency, as it is reported some maintain; neither does it require—as some have claimed—that MSDE “share accurate and timely information with the council” or include homeschoolers in its decision-making.

All of the above taken together, how can such an entity well serve the state’s homeschool community?

An advisory council is not necessary to maintain homeschool liberty nor to support the needs of homeschooling parents and, or related resources. I can attest to the fact that there exists an abundance of innovative, privately funded, and often volunteer-run organizations that well meet the needs of the homeschooling communities and families in Maryland.

Homeschooling has flourished for decades without this sort of assistance from government. Why add all of the unelected ‘gatekeeping’ of a council? Why create an artificial ‘legally-recognized’ voice for/face of MD homeschooling? Why complicate things for the unbroken and thriving homeschooling community and introduce measures that leave it susceptible to negative outcomes? The example of every other state demonstrates that homeschool advocacy is conducted without a statutorily-created council within their state departments of education (even in the lone and singular case of New Hampshire, which is highly specific).

Thus, an official advisory council is, at best, needless and, at worst, it would likely do more harm than good in the future.

I, and other homeschoolers, are deeply thankful for/to the nearly two dozen delegates who, within a week of this bill’s introduction, voiced similar concerns about it and expressed **strong opposition** to it in a letter to Del. Ruth, citing the

potential, negative, long-term implications (if the aforementioned bill were passed into law) and the impossibility that the proposed 16-member panel would adequately reflect/represent the diversity of families' thoughts about and approaches to homeschooling.

As homeschooling families; related groups and organizations; and supporters have learned and shared about this bill, there has been an outcry of concern and objection expressed in calls, emails, and letters to the appropriate delegates regarding the existential threat H.B. 832 represents to the robust and diverse body of Maryland homeschoolers. Will all these voices be ignored? Will valid concerns about a novel, untested, untried, anomalous and hurried idea of a homeschool council be dismissed?

Taking all this into consideration, I again urge you to please **oppose/vote NO** to **H.B. 832**.

Thank you for listening and for your service to the citizens and residents of Maryland.