

Testimony Opposing HB832

By Karon Garrett, Calvert County -- Homeschool Parent of 12 years

Delegates of the Ways and Means Committee,

I'm writing in my opposition to HB832 which would establish a State Homeschool Advisory Council. Rather than increasing the voices of homeschoolers, I see this as limiting the vibrant grassroots opportunities that give every homeschooler a voice, rather than just a chosen few. Establishment of this council will make it harder for individual homeschoolers to make their opinions known and homeschool ideas and actions presented to the state will be limited to those who are on the council and those council members alone. There's not much room for disagreement or debate but what the council determines is best for our community, so it will be.

There's those who praise the grassroots efforts but at the same time are the driving force behind this advisory council. I can't understand this position. In my experience, the grassroots groups in Maryland are highly robust and they work. You can easily see this by the response to this bill that these efforts are alive and well. I've read several website postings, watched YouTube videos, listened to webinar recordings, and received many emails regarding the bill's existence. We're not uninformed or lack information. Word gets out. While we may not have a strong state-wide group like many other states, we do have co-op's, umbrellas, Facebook groups, yes and even old-fashioned email groups which are very active and share the news on everything homeschooling. By nature, we homeschool parents are not ones to sit idly by when we see something that may not align with what we think is best. We are often the first ones to jump in where help is needed. We are those who speak up, we are citizens who vote, we are active in our communities. I've seen these efforts work time and time again in Maryland. Word gets out and homeschoolers get to work. Over the eight years we've lived in Maryland, I've personally sent emails, made phone calls, posted on social media, and even testified to the Ways and Means Committee in 2017 regarding homeschool legislation. I've personally helped those who are new to homeschooling along their path to find their way. I've been helped by those who are on the pathway ahead of me. None of these things took a government committee to make it happen. Time and time again, the homeschool community is just that, a community not a government advisory council. All of this support is made possible by hardy homeschool grapevine which comes alive when needs arise. We don't need an oversight committee to organize us, we are capable to accomplish the work without the burden of a bureaucratic committee. Rather than add this additional layer, MDSE could simply open their meetings to all homeschoolers and make their decision-making process transparent and open to public input and feedback. No new self-appointed advisory board needed.

Beyond the unnecessary need for this council, the organization of the council is suspect in and of itself. Council members are appointed by the council, rather than being chosen by homeschoolers, and council members would continue to self-appoint in perpetuity. Council members also can self-nominate. How does these policies represent everyone's voice? These practices could lead to narrowmindedness of opinion and not truly represent the robustly diverse group of homeschoolers in Maryland. In all reality, it would be impossible to represent every unique homeschooling family. There are only eight seats, there's more to us than that. This committee has no requirement to listen to any voices that speak up for or against any homeschool

issues which may come forward. They are only beholden to themselves and their own views. This could possibly silence a majority opinion because the council's ideas would reign supreme regardless of if it is supported or rejected widely by homeschoolers.

Government oversight generally doesn't make things easier but in turn, often makes processes more cumbersome and can create unnecessary obstacles and pitfalls. Giving up our independence and voices to a limited few who have no accountability to us is a frightening thought. Homeschooling is something we highly value in our home and my husband and I have been grateful to have the autonomy to give our children their very own, individualized education they all deserve.

My wish would be that you would consider the voices who oppose this bill and not move it forward. It is completely unnecessary and could possibly stunt the independence that homeschoolers deserve. Grassroots systems work. The response to this bill proves it! Please reject HB832.