

Mrs. Victoria Bako
5901 Medora Rd.
Linthicum Heights, MD 21090

March 1, 2022

Ways and Means Committee
Room 131
House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: HB0832 Maryland Homeschool Advisory Council – Establishment

Dear ladies and gentlemen of the Ways and Means Committee,

I began my own formal education in private schools, then my parents homeschooled me for about five years before placing me in Broadneck High School. I received my bachelor's in Family Studies (Sociology) at Towson University, where I met my husband.

My husband, Tom, and I decided to homeschool our children before we started our family because, as I looked back on my own education, I had to acknowledge that while I had enjoyed my experiences in school settings as a child, I had so much more educational freedom as a homeschooled student, and that freedom was what I wanted for my children. Tom had gone to public school in Europe his whole life, and had a good experience, but he was very supportive of giving homeschooling a try.

As Tom and I look over the bill in question, we are very concerned about its breadth, open-endedness and lack of protection for homeschool voices. Aren't there other alternatives for hearing the great diversity of homeschool voices in Maryland? Couldn't the issue of involvement be resolved simply by MSDE inviting homeschoolers to a town hall meeting a few times a year? The proposed bill will establish a committee of non-elected MDSE employees as well as non-elected, politically appointed homeschool advocates. What will happen if these non-elected voices decide to ignore the voices of other homeschoolers? Homeschoolers will have little to no recourse because the committee proposed is not designed to answer to us.

Homeschool diversity is about so much more than any of the categories laid out in this bill: race, ethnicity, gender, orientation, gender identity, disability, giftedness, religion, homeschool philosophy. Yes, as a student of the social sciences, I know these categories can be useful when attempting to understand the causes and effects of human behavior, but I am also all too aware that these categories can only tell us so much about any one person or any group of people. Categories are such a narrow way of looking at people, people who are each so unique and

have their own difficulties and dreams. Using categories to define people is as much and more a mistake as using rigid categories to define music or art.

When I look into my own home, there is real diversity here. My husband is an immigrant and speaks three languages. My oldest son and I both have chronic illnesses, my second son has ASD (Level 1) and ADHD, my daughter is a gregarious and curious preschooler and my toddler loves his time with sensory activities and generous quantities of outdoor play. While on the surface there may be other families like ours, no other family can be exactly like ours, or live in the house or neighborhood we live in. People are complex, with complex family and social histories, and our location and abilities and disabilities affect each one of us and our present family systems differently.

In fact, many parents of children with ASD say that if you've met one child with ASD, you've met one child with ASD, because even that disability can manifest so vastly differently from child to child. What of parents with a very disabled child? How can someone with a less-disabled child know of all the supports a severe disability requires? How can someone with a completely different disability really know what a child with ASD needs? Let's not be fooled by the language in this bill: a narrow group of appointed voices cannot represent the true diversity of a whole group of people, no matter how much it attempts to do so.

While the sponsor of this bill claims that the homeschool community was consulted in its creation, this is absolutely not the case. I know hundreds of homeschoolers here in Maryland, and not one of them had heard about this bill until it was proposed to the House. Since early February, I have spoken with many homeschoolers, including umbrella supervisors, about this bill and none of them had been consulted prior to its proposal. So, is this bill truly something the homeschool community as a whole wants? Or is it what a few, select, misguided voices want? Homeschoolers have their own voices to speak for themselves, and I hope our testimony today demonstrates that.

No one I have talked to wants policy changes from MSDE. We are happy with the balance between state interest and parental and student autonomy that we currently have. Please give an unfavorable report on this bill.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Mrs. Victoria Bako