

Eleanor Jones
Carroll County

March 1, 2022

Delegate Ruth
House, Ways & Means Committee

RE: HB832 Homeschool Advisory Council - **Testimony in Opposition**

I am a homeschooling mom to a ten year old boy born with hearing loss. I am opposed to HB832 for many reasons. One of the main reasons is that I also used to volunteer as a parent mentor to other families with children with hearing loss and know firsthand how political and corrupt a state appointed advisory council can be. Our family has no voice in the policies revolving around deaf and hard of hearing kids created in this state partly powered by an advisory council that meets quarterly to discuss children like my son, so I have no desire to fight an additional battle with individuals who are also deliberating on homeschool issues who also do not personally know our family but insist they have our “best interests” at heart.

Here are my other reasons for opposing HB832:

- Our family chose homeschooling because I have experienced how the public school system has failed special needs children as a former elementary school teacher. The IEP process, among many other factors in the public school system, is broken. I refuse to allow for my son to become another statistic lost in a bureaucratic sea of paperwork. We homeschool specifically to avoid as much government overreach as we possibly can. This homeschool advisory council operating under MSDE will add another layer of bureaucracy to homeschooling.
- As previously mentioned above, this homeschool advisory council will be state appointed. I find it quite ironic that this bill has been hyped as “A voice for the homeschooling community,” yet every single member will be appointed by politicians - not elected by actual homeschooling families who have a genuine buy-in during this appointment process. Another portion of this advisory council appointment is the clear lack of representation of each county. Our family is located in Carroll County. The text of this bill reads, “One individual from Carroll County, Frederick County, Washington County, Allegany County, **or** Garrett County.” Literally, this means, all homeschooling families located in this expanded region of Maryland, have a one in five chance of their county being adequately represented. Carroll County is centrally located in this state, it is not

a part of Western Maryland. How exactly do you expect the needs of all homeschooling families to be sufficiently represented by these overly generalized boundaries?

- This bill purports to “Represent the diversity of homeschool families that exist throughout the state,” but are you aware that those of us who have questioned the efficacy of this bill have been banned from a homeschooling Facebook group simply because we brought up our concerns over this bill? Diversity of thought here is definitely not being represented in the homeschooling community as of right now over this bill. How are we to be certain that the administrators of this particular Facebook group don’t get appointed to this homeschool advisory council? And I am pointedly asking this next question to you, Del, Ruth, how do you believe that this bill that you are sponsoring will promote diversity when you have repeatedly refused to acknowledge thousands of us who have pleaded with you to withdraw this bill? You have stated that you have also been a homeschooler, so you should be familiar with the extreme opposition in this state between the Christian homeschoolers and many of the secular homeschoolers, thus also leading to the great divide in this state between conservative homeschoolers and leftist leaning homeschoolers. How do you propose reconciling this divide, particularly when our voices will be represented by political appointees, the vast majority being Democrat with very few Republican, Independent or Libertarian legislators presiding in this state?
- This bill claims that it aims to “Represent the interests of the citizens of the state in promoting homeschooling as a trusted, parent directed, quality school choice.” This bill has already alienated the parent voice in that its advisory council members are state appointed. We also already have parent directed, quality school choice as hundreds of umbrella programs exist in this state that help families advocate for their needs as well as helping families to provide what is in their children’s best interests educationally and emotionally. Not to mention that we also have the Maryland chapter of Homeschool Legal Defense Association to guide us in the event that we would need more representation of our needs.

In closing, we don’t want or need this bill as each and every one of us homeschoolers has been our own voice for our children’s educational and emotional needs. We depend on each other. We lift each other up within our own communities. We perform outreach to new homeschoolers who need direction and resources to begin homeschooling. We contact our local senators and delegates whenever we see an issue arise. We homeschool because we have seen the problems in the public school system and in many private schools. These last two years with the forced and unnecessarily prolonged public school closures, our homeschool community has swelled with new families and none of us missed a beat with continuing to educate our kids and to provide them with the necessary social and emotional nurturing that children

need. So if you're looking to solve problems within the educational realm in this state, look to the failing public school systems. We homeschoolers are doing just fine.

Sincerely,

Eleanor Jones
Carroll County