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9901 Finney Drive
Parkville, MD 21234

February 10, 2022

Sheila S. Ruth
Delegate, Baltimore County
Lowe House Office Building, Room 311
6 Bladen St., Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Ms. Sheila Ruth,

I am writing to you as a mother of three children; I homeschool our school-aged daughters, in 4th and 1st grade, in Baltimore County. The purpose for this message is to ask you to kindly withdraw bill HB 832.

I intend to provide the reasons by which this, the Palmieri Family, does not want bill HB 832, and kindly declines the assistance it could provide.

Ms. Sheila Ruth, I do not know you personally but I believe you are well-meaning delegate, and I appreciate your efforts and willingness to serve the homeschooling community in Maryland. That being said, I cannot be ignorant of history: well-meaning policies, often, gradually REDUCE the FREEDOMS its citizens once had, in the name of regulatory assistance.

These are my top five reasons for asking you to withdraw bill HB 832. My rationale follows.

1. **My husband and I do not want a Board of Representatives to determine homeschool regulations or represent the needs of our homeschooling family.**
2. **We responsibly use the freedom of choice we currently have to teach our children the way they learn best, in the environment where they thrive, with the values we decide to impart (and live with) as members of a caring family unit.**
3. **These parents can and will speak up as advocates for our children. If we need government assistance, we know who to contact. We do not need to be represented by any one person or any group of people.**
4. **We, the parents, are informed, equipped, capable, responsible, and dedicated to regulating the education of our children.**
5. **My husband and I use our uncompensated time to lesson-plan, study, teach, grade papers, facilitate learning experiences outside our homes, mentor friendships, train habits, encourage and reinforce healthy value systems *around the clock* and we still maintain records that comply with Maryland's current homeschooling laws, which are—right now— some of the best in The United States of America.**

Please understand, we don't take our responsibility lightly because the laws provide freedom. We take our responsibility EVER MORE SERIOUSLY because we are allowed the freedom to choose what will yield the greatest results for our children. By "results" I mean a harvest of character qualities, age-appropriate skills, knowledge, and work ethic.

One may ask, "What does homeschooling look like?" "What are homeschoolers in Maryland learning?" or "What do homeschoolers need?" The answer to these questions will differ according to the family you interview. But there are some principles that unite every parent who chooses to homeschool their children, and there are surely sacrifices that validate their authenticity and motives. In order that you may better understand what my homeschool looks like, I provide this background knowledge:

The Palmieris are serious about education, engaged in our classrooms, connected to our overseers and we are accustomed to advocating for our needs. I am a capable, well-educated woman who decided to walk away from my career and those paychecks to teach my children. My husband and I embrace an entirely counter-cultural lifestyle, and we have politely stood up to doubting family members, well-meaning colleagues, and friends who challenged this endeavor. We have done so, to reassure them that: the convictions which maintain our momentum on a daily, hourly, and minute-by-minute basis are the same convictions that motivate us to do our very best at it. Our convictions justify our sacrifice.

One of those convictions is: Sebastien and Rachael Palmieri, will always care more about the wellbeing, success, wholeness, and prosperity of our children than any other human being could. And our life experiences prove this to be true. Our children participate in gymnastics, Good News Club, field trips, library events, programs at Marshy Point and Cromwell Valley Nature Centers, and church-related functions. Our daughters, Eden and Emily, are integral parts of the friendships among our neighborhood kids, homeschool groups, and their own cousins. Each of these experiences in school, with extended family, and all manner of community settings have confirmed it—We care more than they do about our children. Coaches, teachers, mentors, chaperones, park rangers—they do their best, and they do well, but they can't be as focused on individual well-being as we are. It's the natural design of a family and the instinct of a parent. Every bit of their bodies, minds, souls, and spirits are entrusted to us, as parents, and that ought to be a sobering responsibility that keeps us vigilant.

After my first review by the Representative of the Office of Educational Options in Baltimore County, I realized that there is no certificate, no feedback, no rubric—for evaluating my child's success—that could ever be as motivating to me as the true competency, composure, and confidence of the young daughters I am teaching. I teach them with the best methods and materials I have because I want them to be successful. I stay up late at night researching ways to help them understand. I keep a detailed schedule and my own daily records for each child because I care to give them a well-rounded and rigorous educational experience. I

want to be able to provide thorough documentation to those interested in seeing what our students know and are able to do. I have been able to show what we teach and how we organize our lessons.

I have chosen to attach the portfolio review forms for our two daughters for the last three review periods to validate my statements. Ms. Sheila Ruth, the truth is: I don't take my responsibility lightly because the laws provide freedom. I take my vocation EVER MORE SERIOUSLY because I am allowed to customize the learning opportunities that will yield the greatest results for our children. I do not want to fail them because I love them. That love is an ACTION, a DECISION, and a COMMITMENT more often than it is a feeling. If there is something I need from you, or from the Office of Educational Options in order to keep from failing my children, I will most certainly speak up for my family and myself. I have a wonderful relationship with my semi-annual reviewer, Ms. Erika Hamlet, and with the Director of the Office of Educational Options, Ms. Kimberly O'Connor.

As a homeschooling family, there's really "nothing in it for us" from a financial standpoint. Money is not our master. Our heart-values, our physical energies and mental capacities are spent daily as WE SHOW UP to an UN-PAID JOB teaching our precious children. Please don't let the loss of funding from our children's withdrawal from the public school system move you or your fellow delegates to put restrictions upon us that are not necessary. We sacrifice down to the penny to make our lives work on a tight, one-income budget.

We may have more persuasion with a pen than our friends who homeschool, but grit and perseverance are trademarks of a homeschooling family. It would be a shame if well-meaning, highly qualified parents decided to stop homeschooling their children because the regulatory committee is making the practical processes cumbersome, tight, and narrow. It would be awful if, down the road of history, this small group of non-homeschooling adults were to speak for us, misrepresent us, and decide for us what would work best for our children. We homeschool because we believe we know what's best for our own children.

You can call me a strong advocate for my homeschooled children. You can call me a dedicated teacher. You can call me the classroom aide, the school nurse,

the guidance counselor, the health and P.E. coach, the music and performing arts coordinator, and I am—in fact—the director of our homeschool program. Knowing that, I honor, respect, and keep in contact with my reviewer, Ms. Erika Hamlet, and our Director, Ms. Kimberly O'Connor—both of whom are wonderful, quick-to-respond, eager-to-help, knowledgeable, clear communicators.

Do you wonder if my story is too good to be true, or think my children must be easy to parent or effortlessly smart? We are not. Please review our paperwork, and reach out to me with your questions. We live with (and plan strategies to cope with) ADHD, sensitive nervous system, and dyslexia. We are a real family of five, homeschooling in Baltimore County, who don't want to leave a state that has been leading the nation in Homeschooling Options in recent history. We politely and adamantly entreat you. Please withdraw Bill HB 832.

In All Sincerity and With Regards,

Rachael L. Palmieri

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