

Statement of Support for HB 1043

Dear Members of the Ways and Means Committee,

I oversee research for the Coalition for Responsible Home Education (CRHE), the only national organization that advocates for an approach to homeschooling grounded in children's rights. I write to express our support for HB 1043, which would grant homeschooled students the right to participate in athletic activities at public schools.

Investing in homeschooled students plays an increasingly crucial role in preparing the next generation for success. Homeschooling has surged in popularity since the pandemic; [approximately 6% of the school-aged population is now homeschooled](#). Before the pandemic, the homeschooling population had plateaued at roughly 27,000 students. This past school year, the number of reported homeschooled students was [over 42,000](#), a remarkable increase. This makes opening access to sports an increasingly important priority.

Equal access not only allows homeschooled students to benefit from the confidence, discipline, and social skills that sports cultivate, but also opens opportunities for accessing and financing higher education that may otherwise be unavailable to many students. Given the growing size of the homeschooling population, and the fact that more [families from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are switching to homeschooling](#) at rapid rates, there is a compelling human capital argument to be made for opening sports access because it maximizes their potential for economic mobility and future civic participation.

The framing of equal access as a “right to play” resonates with our organization's focus on promoting children's rights, which are vastly underappreciated in our society and legal system. While it is a matter of debate whether access to extracurricular participation is a right *per se*, athletic access is a key component of safeguarding a child's fundamental right to freedom from harm: unfortunately, while most parents homeschool in their children's best interest, our research shows that there are distinct risk factors for abuse and neglect in homeschool settings. [Chief among these is social isolation](#), which is known to exacerbate familial dysfunction and can escalate maltreatment. In the vast majority of cases, the solution to social isolation is offering supportive resources that incentivize engagement with communities and institutions outside the home. Research has repeatedly found that homeschooling families can be [wary of, or antagonistic toward, the state](#); however, homeschooling families largely endorse sports access. Athletic participation therefore offers a path for positive interchange between schools and communities, which benefits all parties.

We do not deny that opening school resources to homeschooled students comes at a cost. However, the return on investment — both in terms of the formation of productive citizens and the moral return of protecting the vulnerable — is well worth it. We urge you to vote in favor of promoting joy and success for all children in Maryland.

Sincerely,
Jonah Stewart, Ph.D.
Director of Programs, Coalition for Responsible Home Education