

Final Comments on HB832 for Your Consideration

--Please Freely Share--

February 28, 2022

Dear Homeschool Friends and Homeschool Allies,

Thank you for your great feedback on the statement I sent this past weekend on my opposition to HB832 and proposal for an alternative solution. (<http://tea-education.com/why-i-oppose-a-state-homesec.html>)

Many comments were like these: 'It sounded like a good idea until I read your points,' 'I assumed the council idea had been discussed first by homeschoolers,' and 'Maybe we don't fully understand what grassroots advocacy means.'

In light of your feedback, I submit these final comments ahead of Thursday's hearing on HB832. Remember, the only/best way to register your opposition to the bill now is ONLINE - TUES MARCH 1st - 8AM to 3PM - on a myMGA Account that you create asap. That info is pasted at the bottom.

Final Comments on HB832 for Your Consideration

*****1—Are homeschoolers aware that the Maryland State Homeschool Advisory Council would NOT be a freestanding, autonomous homeschool council, but actually part of the Maryland State Department of Education?** The council is not a homeschool council that includes some MSDE members, but an MSDE council that includes homeschool members. Statutorily placing what should be freestanding, autonomous homeschool advocacy under MSDE's framework and making it the supposed 'legal voice' of homeschooling in MD in exchange for quarterly council meetings is a chilling thought that I don't think most homeschoolers have taken into consideration. Statutorily entangling MD homeschool advocacy with MSDE, including government voting members, will negatively impact our advocacy power and voice, our homeschool freedom, and make us much more vulnerable to bad actors. This is NOT speaking from fear, but from the reality of the proposed situation.

2—If a MSDE Homeschool Advisory Council is created to look into the needs of homeschool students, that means that ANYONE can bring their concerns to the council, including those like teachers' unions, school boards, adversarial state legislators, and countless others who believe homeschooling does NOT meet the needs of our children. This is one of the many unintended consequences a MSDE State Homeschool Advisory Council could easily and very predictably lead to.

3--Why add all of the unelected 'gatekeeping' of a council when diverse homeschoolers can speak directly with MSDE if given the advocacy tools to do so? Or if homeschoolers reconvene general meetings once held with MSDE? Why create an artificial 'legally-recognized' voice of MD homeschooling? Why make this more complicated and susceptible to negative outcomes than it needs to be? The example of every other state demonstrates that homeschool advocacy is conducted without a statutorily-created council within their State Department of Education (even in NH's case, which is highly specific).

4—Why is HB832 being rushed to a vote this session when the idea of a council came out of the blue less than a month ago? We need to start over and begin a robust, inclusive conversation within the homeschool community on "How to increase HS access / influence with MSDE" before taking steps to pass a bill this session. We haven't been given the opportunity to have this wider conversation, and it has put us in this 'clock-ticking' dilemma where a decision might be made without all options being thoroughly discussed by the widest number of people possible. If the idea is sound, it will withstand a year of genuine discussion and be reintroduced next session. If it is not and becomes law now, it will be extremely difficult to remove from the statutory code.

5—Is this council our only option? Do we need a law creating a State HS Advisory Council within MSDE? -OR- Do we need a law requiring MSDE to host regular public town halls with the HS community? -OR- Do HSers need to be better equipped for individual/group grassroots advocacy as in all other states? **HB832 is the extreme,**

pitfall-fraught way to address the question of how to increase access to MSDE, and won't solve the matter as its supporters are hoping, and actually will create worse problems.

Warmest wishes as you love and learn together with your precious kiddos!

Wendy Bush ~ director@TEA-Education.com

Below is copied from my original statement: **Another Solution** and **March 3rd Zoom Hearing**

Another Solution:

Every benefit the bill seeks to offer can be accomplished without a new state HS law that prescribes how we advocate with MSDE and gives the state voting power in the decisions. We must increase and expand our grassroots advocacy as the solution for anyone who has said they'd like to have a voice in HS matters in Maryland. It can result in an unlimited number of diverse people able to advocate for HSing now and continuing into future generations.

--Increasing MSDE Access: The homeschool community needs to host OPEN meetings with MSDE themselves. In the past, MSDE and the county HS liaisons enthusiastically participated in meetings with umbrellas held by MACHE (once a 4,000-member group until it closed this past year when its leaders retired).

It was HSers who dropped the ball in continuing these meetings. We must resume them in a different format, increase their frequency, and expand them to include HS families, not just umbrellas. I have no doubt that the unexpected roar of HS voices heard by the General Assembly and MSDE about this bill, with the support of our legislative allies, will cause MSDE to agree to resume these meetings with the HS community.

--Advocacy Toolkits: We must create HS Advocacy Toolkits freely available to the HS community so **everyone** can learn how to personally advocate on the state and county levels. These would be nonpartisan, online information tools that everyone can support and use. Those of us who have been dealing with MSDE for decades can describe how the agencies work and how to advocate directly. It also would include Information Pages of people to contact within MSDE, MHEC, Nonpublic School Approval Branch, MBOE; info on using the MD Register; running history of changes to the HS COMAR, list of MD Facebook groups and other communication channels; etc. I'm prepared to coordinate this effort and ensure it is available as a free resource to everyone.

This is the grassroots eternal vigilance advocacy that we know we can rely on. I'd rather trust it than entrust our future HS freedoms to an untried MSDE State council with government voting members that we cannot elect, cannot remove, doesn't answer to anyone, and has no accountability to the homeschool community that it is supposed to speak for.

*****March 3rd ZOOM Hearing on HB 832: Must register before & upload on March 1st*****

Del Ruth and her colleagues on the Ways and Means Committee are eager to see the extent of support for or opposition to HB832. It is vital for you to register your position on the MD General Assembly website on ***Tuesday, March 1 from 8am to 3pm, the only window to do so.*** The input on March 1 will become part of the ***Zoom hearing on March 3*** and determine who the live speakers will be at the Zoom hearing that day.

This ACTION is for anyone concerned about the bill, not just homeschool parents! And, you DO NOT have to sit in on the Zoom hearing on March 3rd to register your opposition on March 1st. Those opposed should register their position as 'Oppose' and choose to offer Both oral and written testimony, written testimony only, or no testimony at all. 'No testimony' (none) will enter your opposition to the bill without any accompanying statement, and is perfectly fine. If you choose to upload a statement, it can be as short as one sentence, or you can draw from things you've read in other comments about the bill. Don't be shy! Numbers are important!

Steps to Register to Oppose the Bill: Must be done on Tuesday, March 1st from 8am to 3pm ONLY

-- (1) To submit testimony for the hearing, you must first create a myMGA account and

(2) then upload your testimony to the myMGA system during the only window available:

Tuesday, March 1st from 8am to 3pm. Don't wait until March 1st to create your myMGA account.

--**Guide for registering for MyMGA:**

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1lrckeMSYYVr888INteu4FasrDHsuvI9m/view>

--**Guide for submitting testimony:**

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/18JtwNYLE45N5sfOSvhqnfZj6fbY7os6p/view>

--Written statements do not need to be lengthy. One sentence is even enough. Or check, "Opposed" and choose, 'None' for your statement choice.

--FAQs from Ways and Means Committee on how they hold their hearings: <https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/pubs-current/current-wam-faqs.pdf>

###