

House Government Accountability & Oversight Committee
Opponent Testimony on House Bill 512
By Kristen Schnipke
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Chairman Blessing, Vice Chair Reineke, Ranking Member Clyde, and members of the House Government Accountability and Oversight Committee, my name is Kristen Schnipke and I appreciate the opportunity to offer testimony today in opposition to HB 512.

As a home educator and a mother of three, I hold my early childhood education degree and am one class shy of my BA in psychology. I do believe there are flaws in our current education system. It's one of the reasons I do what I do for my children by choosing home education. Even though changes need to be made in our education system, my thoughts differ from the bill's sponsors and cosponsors as to which direction the change should come from.

I'd like to make it known I have never been interested in public speaking, or political affairs at all, for that matter. Despite my disinterest in politics, I am here to testify in front of you and that should speak volumes. It's common for me to sit back and let you all do what you do and just cross my fingers and hope it all works out for the best. However, this time you caught my attention. Your policy may not currently impede my family's right to homeschool, but it does open doors that give the government the right to dictate mine and my children's educational choices. To better explain the doors your bill opens, I would like to delve into the wording of the bill.

This bill states, and I quote "every child of compulsory school age shall attend a school or participate in a special education program that conforms to the minimum standards prescribed by" end quote, the predominately elected state Board of Education, scratch that, solely appointed Department of Learning and Achievement. If we continue down into the section a bit where the bill expands upon which children your DLA's minimum standards affect, you'll find my children, under section C. Section C states they must adhere to the previously quoted regulations until "the child is excused from school under standards adopted by the [predominately elected state board of education, scratch that, the solely appointed] DLA".

As I read, in layman's terms, the appointed cabinet, the DLA, will be establishing minimum standards for not only my home educated children but public-school children, religious school children, special education school children, essentially all school children of Ohio. This alone is the governor's door into our homes.

Moving on now, not much further into the bill, if we look to section 3321.04, the bill reads "every parent of any child of compulsory school age who is not employed under an age and schooling certificate must send such child to a school or a special education program that conforms to the minimum standards prescribed by [the predominately elected State Board of Education, scratch that, the solely appointed] Department of Learning and Achievement, for the full-time the school or program attended is in session which shall not be for less than 32 weeks per school year".

Although the bill does grant the superintendent the right to excuse my home educated child from the regulations of this section, my child can only be excused if, and I'm quoting the bill here, they "are being instructed at home by a person qualified to teach the branches in which instruction is required in such additional branches, of the advancement and needs of the child may, in the opinion of such superintendent, require". Sounds reasonable, right? Except for the word "excuse" in my opinion, but I digress. It sounds reasonable until you get to the closing paragraph of the section, in which the bill reads the [predominately elected state Board of Education, scratch that, the solely appointed] "Department of Learning and Achievement may by rule prescribe conditions governing the issuance of excuses, which shall be binding upon the authorities empowered to use them". This section gives the governor, through the DLA, the right to dictate excusal standards through the superintendent. Here is another door into my home for the governor and his appointed DLA. A door I am opposed to being left open, a door that if you unlock, will prompt my family to move states.

Moving forward. not that those points are not strong enough, let's talk about the big door. The overhead loading dock door, if you will. You'll find this door in section 3321.07 and it reads "if any child attends upon instruction elsewhere than in a public school such instruction shall be in a school which conforms to the minimum standards prescribed by the [predominantly elected State Board of Education, scratch that, the solely appointed] Department of Learning and Achievement.

In regards to this section, Representative Reineke, you posted a question to Chad Aldis the VP for Ohio Policy and Advocacy at the Thomas B Fordham Institute. This question, though probably not verbatim, asked does anything in this bill affect the rights of homeschoolers. His answer, simply put, was "no". I would like to submit section 3321.07 as evidence. Mr. Aldis either missed that part of the bill or, with all due respect, he was misinformed. Because as I read this, the bill directly affects home education. When the bill reads "any child who attends instruction outside of the public school", it's speaking of my home educated child and regulating that they must meet the minimum standards set forth by the solely appointed DLA. Again, this clearly affects home education and essentially gives the governor and his DLA a key to my home school.

In conclusion, I have only referenced three pages of this bill, but as others have testified before, the same language is woven throughout its entirety. Language that threatens all student and parental rights; language that threatens my rights as a home educator; language that threatens to have my child placed in your pipeline of crib to career education; language that stifles my child's choice of a career. We parents and educators will not standby as you continue to tell us this bill in no way affects policy, because while you haven't currently changed the game, you intend to not only change the game makers, but also to appoint them. This change opens every family's door to expanded government and regulation without representation. Although I may not have all the answers, I truly believe the solely appointed DLA is not the answer.

Thank you for your consideration and the opportunity to testify before you today. I would be pleased to answer any questions that the Committee might have.