

Ohio House Public Health Policy Committee
Testimony of Melanie Elsey
H.B. 602
June 26, 2024

Chairman Mathews, Vice Chair Stewart, Ranking Member Liston, and members of the Public Health Policy Committee, I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony in support of H.B. 602. My name is Melanie Elsey. I serve as a legislative liaison for Christian Home Educators of Ohio, which is an organization that has provided support statewide for home educating families for the past 35 years.

Home education has been a part of the landscape of educational opportunities for Ohio students for decades. Parents, who choose to make the commitment to home educate, will often find opportunities for their children to learn specific concepts with other home educated children in small group settings. These may include science labs, art lessons, drama clubs, expository writing labs, and countless other examples. Parents within local groups often offer their own expertise in subjects or they may bring in local experts to provide direct instruction. The experiences of these groups differ significantly from a day care structure that would require a state license. Yet an unclear interpretation of the day care licensing statute can lead to unnecessary actions from the governing state agency.

H.B. 602 is intended to describe the characteristics of a home education learning pod (RC 5104.01(U) and 5104.01(V)) and provide an exemption for this learning experience from the licensure requirements in RC 5104.02. This would be an addition to current law, which itemizes a list of “persons, firms, institutions, organizations, or agencies” which operate any of the specified programs already exempted in this section.

The revision in state policy will provide a necessary clarification to distinguish the small group learning opportunities from day care structures, which provide basic non-educational care to preschool and younger children.

Home School Legal Defense Association is a national homeschool advocacy organization which serves roughly 100,000 member families, including approximately 4,500 member families in Ohio. Two of HSLDA’s staff attorneys have submitted written testimony with a request that I read / highlight their remarks in their absence this morning. They are not able to deliver their remarks in person due to previous obligations.

Amy Buchmeyer, Esq. in part states, “For many parents, a crucial component of their homeschool includes gathering for social and academic instruction with other homeschooling families. Yet, when doing so, parents can unwittingly run afoul of zoning and daycare laws - or rather interpretations of these laws that are at odds with the flexibility provided to them within the homeschool law.” She further states,

“HB 602 supports the right of parents to direct the education of their children by providing necessary clarification to statutes that could be misapplied to long-standing educational strategies.”

Darren Jones, Esq. serves as Senior Counsel and Director of Group Services at HSLDA. He provides a thorough description of the use of homeschool support groups across the country and the occasional misapplication of state policies, which have resulted in multiple states defining and protecting the learning opportunities of the local homeschool groups. I would encourage you to review the statutory changes Mr. Jones has outlined in his testimony for the states of Texas, Georgia, West Virginia, and Utah.

Please take a moment to review both of these submitted written testimonies in their entirety.

In conclusion, I would respectfully request your favorable consideration of H.B. 602. I would be glad to answer any questions you may have.