

PENNSYLVANIA HOMESCHOOLERS

A STATEWIDE NETWORK SHARING INFORMATION ABOUT HOME EDUCATION

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Successful Lobbying Day in Harrisburg

from Howard Richman

A lobbying day and rally against the expansion of the compulsory school age was held on October 16 at the Harrisburg Capitol. A Harrisburg radio station estimated that about 300 homeschoolers were in attendance. We visited and talked with our representatives and senators and passed out fact sheets at each office on the bill. Many used the day as a chance to tour the capitol building and educate their children about the workings of state government. A press conference and rally was held at 11am. While homeschoolers sat on the Capitol steps, Karen Keckler (Concerned Women of Pennsylvania), and I spoke to the press. (The text of my speech follows this article.)

We were campaigning against House Bill 1695, a bill that would expand the compulsory attendance age from the present 8-17 to 6-18. The day was very successful. Some of the Representatives who sponsored the bill (including Rep. Daley) have withdrawn their names from sponsorship. Indications are that we will have until next June before the bill is brought up for a vote in the House. Even if it passes the House, indications are that it would be defeated in the Senate.

The battle is not over. The reason that we are winning is because many homeschoolers are writing and visiting their Representatives and Senators to oppose the bill. The legislators are hearing from constituents who oppose it and they aren't hearing from any who favor it. It is important to keep up our visits and letters. If you haven't written a letter yet, write one now. Send it to your Representative or Senator (House Post Office or Senate Post Office, Main Capitol, Harrisburg PA 17120). Please

don't send any letter off without first having someone else check it over for spelling or grammatical errors. Letters should only be one page long.

Most homeschoolers are too shy to visit their legislators by themselves, so we need the support groups to organize things. Every support group needs to designate someone to organize a meeting. It can be held in the same place as your usual support group meetings. In general, Saturday morning is a good time. Call and invite all of the Representatives and Senators in your area to the meeting. Just plan for the meeting to be about 1 hour long. Have parents and/or children give short 5 minute talks, and invite the legislators themselves to say a few words. Plan for donuts and coffee afterwards. If you want any help planning the meeting, just give us a call and we'll help you from this end. Drop us a note afterward so that we can tell others about your meeting in the next issue of *PA Homeschoolers*.

Anyone desiring fact sheets on these issues can just send a self addressed stamped envelope to us and I will send you out the four fact sheets that I have put together.

It is clear that we are winning the battle to keep the compulsory school age up at 8. If homeschoolers continue to write to their representatives and senators on this issue and if support groups will now have meetings with their representatives and senators across the state, we will win.

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Speech Given at Harrisburg Rally

My name is Howard Richman. I taught reading in public schools for 12 years and I have a PhD from the University of Pittsburgh in the teaching of reading and English. I have written books and professional articles in the areas of education and cognitive psychology. My wife and I publish a statewide homeschooling newsletter.

We homeschoolers oppose Pennsylvania's House Bill 1695 which passed the House Education Committee on June 18th, and could come up for a vote at any time. This is a short bill that expands the compulsory attendance age. At the lower end it reduces the age when children have to enter first grade from 8 to 6. At the upper end it raises the age that children are permitted to complete their educations from 17 to 18. We oppose both changes. I will discuss each in turn.

Lowering the entrance age

The lower end of the bill lowers the age when children must enter first grade. The Department of Education has argued that the compulsory attendance age must be lowered from 8 to 6 in order to protect 26,000 6- and 7-year-olds who are currently not in school. According to the Department their goal is to enroll economically disadvantaged, homeless, or migrant children who are at-risk if not forced into school at age 6 or 7. This goal sounds great. Everybody wants to help the homeless and the economically disadvantaged. But would this bill really help them?

Let's look at the homeless. This bill would not effect them at all. These children do not have homes or any other addresses where they can be found by

PA Homeschoolers masthead hand lettered by Jacob Richman, age 11

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