

Threatening Bills Tamed in Harrisburg

by Howard Richman

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In general, things look pretty safe for homeschoolers in Harrisburg. Here is a quick update on three bills that we are following in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives:

Teacher Certification Bill Amended

If House Bill 2100 passes, as it is likely to do this fall, many homeschool evaluators will get a letter five years from now from the Secretary of Education telling them that their teaching certificates are "inactive." However, they will not need to panic.

Rep. Jess Stairs, the Republican Chair of the House Education Committee, has added an amendment to HB 2100 which says that "inactive" teachers will still be able to do home education program evaluations!

Thank you to the many homeschoolers who took around our fact sheets about this bill during last September's Homeschool Excellence Day. You did it!

Compulsory School Age Bill Dying

In the last issue I wrote about House Bill 2125 which would lower the beginning compulsory school age from 8 to 6. After that many homeschoolers with Republican legislators asked their legislators to ask Rep. Jess Stairs to kill it in his committee.

We can also especially thank the Chester County homeschoolers for their action after Republican Representative Elinor Z. Taylor added her name to the list of sponsors. After receiving calls from home-schoolers in Chester County she quickly decided to take her name off of the list of sponsors.

Because of these actions, HB 2125 remains an almost purely Democrat-sponsored bill, and Rep. Jess Stairs has decided to let it die in his committee (the House Education Committee). That means that it will not be voted upon this session.

New School Age Bill Introduced

A new bill (HB 2344) was introduced on March 12, 1998. Like HB 2125, it would lower the compulsory school age and has very little chance of passage this session. However, a bill like it may pass during some future session, especially if Democrats regain control of the House and Senate.

Those whose representatives are co-sponsors, may want to contact their representatives and express their disagreement and perhaps get others in their district to do the same. It would do all of the following:

- Lower the compulsory school age from 8 to 6.
- Require all school districts to provide all-day kindergarten. (Currently most school districts only provide a half-day kindergarten.)
- Require school districts to make schooling available for all children 5 and up. (Currently it is 6 and up.)

The sponsors of the bill are:

- Connie Williams, Democrat, Montgomery
- Fred Bellardi, Democrat, Lackawanna County
- Patricia Carone, Republican, Butler County
- Mark Cohen, Democrat, Philadelphia
- Frank Dermody, Democrat, Allegheny County
- Mike Horsey, Democrat, Philadelphia
- Harold James, Democrat, Philadelphia
- Babette Josephs, Democrat, Philadelphia
- Kathy Manderino, Democrat, Philadelphia
- Anthony Melio, Democrat, Bucks County
- William Russell Robinson, Democrat, Allegheny

This bill is unlikely to pass given the fact that Republicans are currently in control of the PA House and Senate and the Governorship and it only has one Republican sponsor, Rep. Carone whose home office is in Cranberry Township of Butler County.

Apparently, the goal of those who want to lower the beginning school age is to get ever earlier education into the public schools and make it compulsory.