

Bills Introduced in Harrisburg

from Howard Richman

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On January 1 a new two-year legislative session began in PA and a flurry of bills was introduced that could affect homeschooling. If you would like to be notified when any of these bills is about to come up for a vote, e-mail howard@pahomeschoolers.com note your county of residence, and ask to be added to the PA Homeschoolers e-mail tree (which is only available to subscribers of this newsletter).

You can get copies of any of these bills by calling the House Bill Room (717-787-5320) or, if you have Internet access, you can read the bills and even track their progress in the electronic bill room at: www.legis.state.pa.us/WU01/LI/BI/billroom.htm or click on the bill below to go directly to the legislative webpage for that bill and then click on "Bill History" to track its progress. Do let us know if you learn that they have been changed or are coming up for a vote so we can pass that info on to others.

Bill would Restrict Drivers' Licenses

[House Bill 323](#) would tie drivers' licenses to school attendance. According to the initial version of the bill, children who are 17 or under would not be able to get a drivers' licence unless they were enrolled in school or a course of instruction leading toward a GED. No provision was made for 16- or 17-year-old children who were enrolled in home education programs. Thus, if passed in its present form, this bill would prevent 16- and 17-year old homeschoolers from getting drivers' licenses!

Most of the sponsors of the bill are Democrats, so, since Republicans control the PA House of Representatives, it is unlikely that the bill will pass in its present form. Still, the legislators involved need to be contacted by their homeschooling constituents so that the next time they support a bill to restrict drivers' licences, they will make sure that it recognizes homeschooling.

The following are the initial sponsors. If one of them is your representative, please call and ask him or her to please include homeschoolers as a valid option in any future versions: Mayernik, Washington, Tigue, Readshaw, Markosek, Hershey, Youngblood, Staback, and Barrar.

Bill would Change Medical Requirements

[House Bill 30](#) would add in an additional medical exam and an additional dental exam to the current examinations required of all homeschooled and school-educated students in Pennsylvania. This bill would make the following specific changes:

1. Medical exams would be required an extra time. Currently they are required at school entrance, in sixth grade, and in eleventh grade. The new requirements would be school entrance, fifth grade, eighth grade, and eleventh grade.
2. Dental exams would be required an extra time. Currently they are required at school entrance, third grade, and seventh grade. This bill would add tenth grade.

The bill also would require additional medical examinations for those who participate in school sports.

Bill would Make School Activities Available

[Senate Bill 358](#) would mandate that the public school districts must let homeschoolers participate in school sports, musical ensembles, clubs, theatrical programs and other extra-curricular activities. It is sponsored by Senators Murphy, Jubelirer, Bell, M. White, Helfrick, Dent, Waugh, Costa, O'Pake, Stout, Tomlinson, Greenleaf, Corman, and Earll.

Bill would Lower Compulsory School Age

[House Bill 230](#) would lower Pennsylvania's beginning compulsory school age from 8 to 6. The sponsors of the bill include 1 Republican and 17 Democrats. The lone Republican is Rep. Frank Tulli of Dauphin County. The Democrats are Representatives Roebuck, Bishop, Curry, Daley, Frankel, Harhal, James, Manderino, Michlovic, Preston, Staback, Sturla, Tigue, Washington, Waters, C. Williams, and Colafella. I suggest the following plan of action:

1. Those homeschoolers with Republican Representatives should call their representative and ask them to call Representative Jess Stairs (R), Chair of the House Education Committee, and ask him to kill House Bill 230 in his committee. If Rep. Stairs gets phone calls from several Republicans, he is unlikely to let the bill out of his committee.
2. Those homeschoolers whose representatives are sponsors of this bill should arrange a meeting of a group of homeschoolers with that representative in order to persuade that representative to drop his or her sponsorship of this bill. State representatives never like to have organized groups from their community opposing them. If they feel stung for co-sponsoring this bill, it is unlikely that they would co-sponsor a bill like this in the future. It is especially important that the homeschoolers in Rep. Tulli's district contact him since he is the sole Republican sponsor.

In the past, we have been able to kill bills like this. Here are some of the arguments that we have used:

- This bill would force homeschooling families to begin documenting the formal education of their children at age six, instead of eight, and would thus pressure us to imitate the common practice of the schools by pushing formal work on students whether or not they are ready. Under the present rules, some home-schooled children begin to learn to read at age 3, and others begin to learn to read at age 8. Once homeschooled children learn to read, they usually become very good readers.
- This bill would force all 6-year old school children into first grade and thus stop public and private school parents from holding immature students out of first grade until they are ready. (Kindergarten does not meet compulsory attendance requirements in Pennsylvania.)
- This bill would raise the cost of home education for homeschooling parents of six and seven year-olds who would have to pay teachers or psychologists to evaluate their portfolios. Homeschoolers are one of the only educational groups that does not ask the legislature for money, yet the legislature is considering a bill that would raise our costs.
- When the homeschool law passed, we accepted all of the requirements because we knew they would not apply until our children turned 8. We consider the relaxed start for homeschooling in PA one of the best aspects of our law and part of the agreement between homeschoolers and our legislators.
- By far the majority of parents affected by this bill are homeschoolers. Almost all other parents put their children in school at age 6.

We can stop this bill! All it will take is a few phone calls and meetings.