

Proponents say HB 2560 has run out of Time

by Howard Richman

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Proponents of House Bill 2560, the radical rewrite of the homeschool law, sent out e-mails in July stating that if House Bill 2560 were to fail to pass the House Education Committee by mid-August, it would not have time to pass. For example, on July 19, Dee Black of the Homeschool Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) wrote:

Unless [HB 2560 passes out of committee] by mid-August, it is unlikely that there is enough time left in the current legislative session for the bill to be considered by both the full House of Representatives and the Senate. This year's legislative session is scheduled to end on November 27, 2002.

Mid-August came and went without any indication from the House Education Committee that they were about to take up the bill. Instead, most members of the House Education Committee oppose HB 2560 because it lacks accountability and because the homeschooling community is divided.

Accountability

Christian Homeschool Association of Pennsylvania (CHAP) has found that most legislators won't support a bill that lacks accountability. In a broadcast e-mail, dated July 11, they wrote:

What reasons do legislators give us for not supporting HB2560? In a word -- Accountability. They feel that we need to be accountable to the government. They are fearful that parents would not do what is necessary to educate their children unless the government watches over them and makes sure that they are doing it.

CHAP neglects to point out, here, that the accountability in the current homeschool law is to an evaluator of our own choice, not to the government, and that evaluators can be fellow homeschoolers or non-public school teachers who share our educational or religious philosophy.

Homeschoolers Divided

Legislators are also well aware that homeschoolers are deeply divided regarding House Bill 2560. As we reported in the last issue of this newsletter, homeschoolers in the audience at the June 13 informational meeting of the House Education Committee were divided between those supporting the bill, wearing red, those opposing the bill, wearing blue, and some in other colors. The only independent count of how many were wearing each color was given by Mike Wereschagin in a June 14 article in the Harrisburg Patriot-News who wrote that about 650 wore red and about 150 wore blue. When I was on the stage with the legislators, it seemed to me that the clapping was equally loud after points made by pro

and anti-bill speakers. On August 13, one member of the committee wrote to an opponent of HB 2560:

I just spoke with the [House Education Committee] Chairman, Rep. Jess Stairs, on the status of the bill yesterday. I have recommended that it is the responsibility of the prime sponsor, Rep. Rohrer, to work out an acceptable compromise within the homeschooling community before we take any further action, as a committee. You are correct -- homeschooling parents are split on this bill and I really don't think it is the job of the Education Committee members to act as the referee in this case.

Sometime this fall, probably in October, either the House Education Committee will meet to discuss HB 2560 or Rep. Stairs will tell Rep. Rohrer that his bill will not be considered until he works out a compromise within the homeschooling community.

Alternative not Replacement

In my testimony at the June 13 informational meeting I proposed just such a compromise. I said that Pennsylvania Homeschoolers Accreditation Agency would not oppose the language of House Bill 2560 if it were made an alternative to the current home education law, rather than a replacement.

Rep. Rohrer could follow the principle that HSLDA enunciated when attacking a similarly divisive bill in New Hampshire. HSLDA favored opening up new options, not attacking the current law, and urged homeschoolers to work together rather than wasting time attacking one another.

If a bill would create a new home education option while leaving the current law alone, those who prefer the current law for its positive accountability, due process safety, school sports access in about half of the school districts, borrowing of textbooks, and recognized homeschool organization diplomas, would still be able to follow it. Not only that, but it would not be putting us all at risk since it would not open up the current law to amendment by the educational establishment.

In 2003, Rep. Sam Rohrer will decide whether or not to introduce another homeschooling bill. If he chooses to do so, he will also choose whether to make his bill a rewrite or an alternative to the current law. Hopefully he will stop trying to take away the option of following the current law from those who appreciate its perks and protections.

[Read more about HB 2560](#)