

My Position on House Bill 2560

from Debra Bell

[from issue 80 -- Fall 2002 -- of PA HOMESCHOOLERS newsletter]

I have received many calls and letters asking me to take a stand on HB 2560. I haven't to date, because relationships are far more important to me than politics and I have friends on both sides of this issue. Secondly, I'm not particularly political to begin with. But, after composing and revising this statement several times, here is what is in my heart for our movement here in PA:

I'm in favor of a substantial change to the homeschool law, but I believe HB 2560 goes too far. I would like to see a meaningful level of accountability to prevent high school dropouts* and deadbeat parents from claiming to be homeschoolers. I believe accountability deals with the realities of the sinful nature of man. If folks can claim to be homeschooling without demonstrating to any earthly authority (governmental or otherwise) that they are responsibly overseeing their children's education, some of us will progressively slide towards greater and greater abuse of this right and threaten the freedom of all.

Having traveled widely, I agree with HSLDA's observation that there is little difference in performance (between those who submit to some performance measurement) from state to state; whether highly regulated or unregulated. I have also observed that homeschoolers in less regulated states are more relaxed and stress-free than those here in PA, and the vast majority are responsible, earnest parents.

However, as I have traveled to less regulated states, folks have expressed 1) concern about high school "dropouts" claiming to be homeschoolers in their state and 2) interest in PA's diploma programs as a way of establishing credibility. Friends of mine who have lived in both PA and less regulated states have also observed that homeschoolers are regarded with greater respect here in PA, than in the unregulated states where they lived. They credited this to the higher level of accountability and the diploma programs we have. Do we really need to risk losing this? Is it necessary to give up what protection the law has provided our reputation as people of integrity, while addressing the clear burdensomeness of the current law?

I would also be able to support several options of enrollment, such as a religious exemption option for those who see any accountability to the state as intrusive, enrollment under an umbrella school as a means of voluntary accountability; or another for those who would like to avail themselves of services they believe their tax dollars have paid for, such as participation in scholastic sports. Fundamentally, I support parental choice and would hope that we could all support this concept even when we would not select a certain choice ourselves.

I would also like to see our diploma programs protected for those who value this option. These programs have been a service to many families in PA, and it seems we should be able to address the concerns PHAA members in particular are raising, without impinging upon the preferences of those who do not wish to participate in them. No one can say with

certainty how a law might be applied in future political climates, so it seems reasonable to work for the greatest degree of clarity in language now as is possible.

As the bill moves out of committee and is likely amended, I hope to be able to support it; because it is time for a change. But let us position ourselves now to labor together, as we have been, once we get to the other side of this process. I have always been immensely grateful for the unity we have enjoyed here in PA, even though we are quite a diverse lot of folks. It has been a gift from God, and we don't want to lose His favor in the process.

Finally, the most important thing I'd like to say is this; and it is written by one who has regretfully burned far too many bridges in the past:

I'm greatly grieved by the rhetoric being flung around, especially by those who identify themselves as Christians. God is far more concerned about our hearts during this process, than He is about this law. Those of us who are Christians must remember the gospel is to be the central message of our lives and how we conduct ourselves during this process will attract or repel others. God is testing our hearts during this season of debate and conflict. Even if we have the truth (which we may or may not in this situation), truth spoken without love is an offense to our Father in heaven and damages the cause of Christ. Let us go about our business according to our convictions with eternity in view.

In His Sovereign Grace,

Debra Bell

June 5, 2002

* I do not mean that parents without high school diplomas should be disqualified from homeschooling. That is not my position, and it has never been my position. I do not want kids under the age of 17 to claim to be homeschoolers, when they are really truant and doing nothing to acquire an education.

[If quoted or printed, please do in its entirety. Thank you -- Debra Bell].

Debra Bell is a nationally known homeschooling expert from Pennsylvania. In addition to giving homeschooling workshops across the country, she has homeschooled her own four children from elementary school through high school. She is the owner of the Home School Resource Center and the Young Writer's Institute and the author of *The Ultimate Guide to Homeschooling*. [Read more about HB 2560](#)