

Proposed Homeschool Law in Pennsylvania -- House Bill 2560 -- Date 2002

from Donald D. Joye, May 2002

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

As President of Chester County Homeschoolers Association, the fourth largest in the state, I have read both sides of the controversy concerning this bill. I find it very unfortunate to be caught between two organizations we have been part of for over 15 years. The homeschooling law of 1988 in the state of Pennsylvania was not, and is not, a perfect document. But it did so away with capricious and invasive actions by the state which always had the threat of "lawsuit over them. Some of our members were involved in such suits. We appreciate not only the home school law (Act 169) but also the work of HSLDA (Home School Legal Defense Association) hand have personally met and had dealings with Michael Farris and DeWitt Black -- both fine men. I would not be a day without membership in HSLDA. We have also been members of Howard and Susan Richman's "Pennsylvania Homeschoolers Diploma Program" for all this time as well. Our third and last son graduates from that program this June and will follow his brothers to Villanova University, where I am a Professor. We have high regard for the Richmans' PHAA program. According to Howard there are seven diploma programs in the state -- all threatened by HB 2560. These diploma programs are important, not only from the viewpoint of accountability to an authority outside the home, but also for college entrance.

Let me illustrate by one experience I had. It is well known in my University that I am a homeschooling advocate, practitioner and leader. My department chairman called on me to advise him about an applicant who wanted to study chemical engineering. He was looking for standardized test scores (SAT's in particular) that would tell him how well this student stacked up against the competition. These scores were lacking. He then looked for validation of his diploma program -- there was only the G.E.D. He then asked me about the course of study, and since I knew something about it, I told him. He accepted my comments as advice, but still wanted something more. Since it wasn't in the application, the student was not admitted. These are the facts of life in the real world. Yes, Villanova is a highly rated, competitive school, and the applicant probably could have been accepted elsewhere, but the fact remains -- homeschoolers will be judged by what they do relative to others. State-recognized diploma programs carry weight -- the same as a diploma from any high school. And the SAT scores are important for college.

Some portions of Act 169, the present home school law, are unwieldy and should be eliminated, for example the objectives requirement. However, HB 2560 goes too far in eliminating things that have proven value. Portfolios, for example, are extremely useful for many things -- not the least of which is providing the critics of homeschooling with tangible evidence of activity and level of accomplishment, and this is extremely beneficial. I doubt we would have kept so good a record if it were not required.

I have serious doubts about the last provision of HB 2560 concerning establishment of graduation requirements so that home education programs have the same weight as high school diplomas. I don't see this as at all practical or believable by those outside the homeschooling community. That's the very reason why independent, state recognized

diploma programs should be encouraged and protected -- because they are believable, and by virtue of state recognition incorporate education "equivalent" to the high school programs. We have this already. Why throw it away?

I am all for a freer law in Pennsylvania -- but not at the expense of accountability. I am a little surprised that HSLDA does not appear to see it that way.

[Read more about HB 2560](#)