

Military Ends Recruitment Discrimination

by Howard Richman

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As a result of lobbying in Washington by the Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA), a provision giving homeschoolers *preferred* status in military recruitment became law at the end of January 2006 when President Bush signed the latest Defense Appropriations Bill. This provision was opposed by some segments of the homeschooling community, who held that it would let the Secretary of Defense regulate homeschool graduation.

This new provision overcomes the negative effects of the decision by the military in October 2004 to move homeschoolers from the high school graduate category (tier 1) to the GED category (tier 2). That decision resulted from a Defense Department study which found that homeschool grads have a greater tendency than school grads to drop-out of the military before completing their commitments.

Unfortunately, in many states school drop-outs are enhancing their resumes by "homeschooling" until "graduation." This is partly indicated by the relatively low scores of "homeschooled" recruits on the military's aptitude test. Although the average real homeschool student does better than the average school student on academic tests, the average drop-out does worse. While there are many options for homeschoolers to earn diplomas through sound accountability measures and documentation of learning, in many states those who have dropped-out of school can easily claim to be homeschool graduates without having to meet any standards whatsoever. When they enroll in the military, those with a history of dropping-out tend to do so again. That's why the military prefers school graduates to those who have a GED.

Initially, the military will try to separate the real homeschoolers from drop-outs simply by requiring that students be homeschooled legally for at least one year prior to homeschool graduation. The bill also gives the Secretary of Defense the ability to set additional standards in order to define who is really a homeschool graduate.

According to the HSLDA, the bill is an unqualified success for homeschoolers. In an Internet posting, they wrote:

Homeschool graduates who desire a career with any of the four Armed Services are currently designated as "preferred enlistees." This means that homeschool graduates who enlist in the military will be treated as if they are Tier I candidates even though their formal status will remain Tier II. Therefore, homeschoolers will receive the same educational benefits, cash bonuses, and available positions in the Armed Services that they would receive if they were Tier I candidates.

Not all homeschoolers are pleased with this provision's passage, however. National Home Education Legal Defense (NHELD), along with several other libertarian homeschool groups,

mounted an unsuccessful national lobbying effort against it. They argued that it lets the Secretary of Defense regulate home school graduation when it states, "In prescribing the policy, the Secretary of Defense shall prescribe a single set of criteria to be utilized by the Armed Forces in determining whether an individual is a graduate of home schooling." They also warned that the appearance of the words "home school" in federal statutes would eventually lead to a federal definition of homeschooling that could regulate what homeschoolers must do.

We are very pleased with this new law and congratulate HSLDA for its successful national lobbying effort. Without a bill like this one, all of the services would discriminate against homeschoolers, especially during eventual times of peace when they would be able to meet their goals just by recruiting school graduates.