

PENNSYLVANIA HOMESCHOOLERS

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PA Homeschoolers masthead hand lettered by Jesse Richman, age 13 Editors: SUSAN & HOWARD RICHMAN Subscription: \$10 a year/4 issues

Educational Choice Bills Introduced in PA

from Howard Richman

Two educational choice bills are being introduced in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives. Their purpose is to give parents vouchers which they can take to the public or non-public school their children attend. Then the schools can turn in the vouchers to the Pennsylvania Department of Education to get money.

In the short run, these bills would strengthen non-public schools and keep many in business that are now going bankrupt. In the long run, these bills and their successors would probably turn non-public schools into public schools. (See Tom Eldredge's article on page 2 for a more complete discussion.)

On the other hand, many advocates see choice bills as a way to force public schools to compete with non-public schools by offering a better education for students and a friendlier attitude toward parents. In view of the sad state of public education and the haughty attitude of many teachers and administrators, this is a worthy goal.

One of the bills, introduced by Rep. William F. Adolph Jr., would also give money vouchers to homeschooling parents which the parents could use for their own homeschooling programs. Homeschoolers participation would be purely voluntary, but "a grant to a home education program shall be discontinued when a hearing examiner determines that a home education program is not providing an appropriate education." You can write to your State Representative for a copy of this bill. Just ask for House Bill 981.

The other bill leaves homeschoolers out. It has broad based support from a coalition called the REACH (Road to Educational Achievement through Choice) Alliance. The REACH alliance

includes conservatives, businessmen, Catholic school supporters, and Christian school supporters. Call the REACH hotline (717-238-1878 or 215-732-4100) for information about this bill and the concept of choice in education in general.

These bills were just introduced in April. They are not about to be voted on. They will go to the House Education Committee for consideration. When the committee holds hearings, homeschoolers will probably be invited to testify since we are mentioned specifically in one of the bills. In the meantime, we have a chance to discuss our position within the homeschooling community. **We invite you to write us about how you stand so that we can publish as many points of view as possible in our next newsletter due out late summer.** We reserve the right to edit long pieces so that we can fit more points of view in the next newsletter.

I can see four questions that we must answer with regard to the language of the choice bills.

1. **Do we want homeschoolers mentioned in the choice bills?** If homeschoolers are mentioned in a choice bill that passes, the result could be tighter regulation of homeschooling. We are fooling ourselves if we think that the government ever gives money without eventually taking away some freedom. In Oregon, homeschoolers were included in a choice referendum that would have given people tax credits for educational expenses. The referendum had provisions which would prevent tighter regulation of homeschools and Christian schools once it passed, so the educational establishment moved to institute tighter regulations before it passed. Many homeschooling leaders took weeks out of their lives just to delay the enactment of

these regulations. The tighter regulations have not been brought up again since the referendum was voted down.

2. **Do we want homeschoolers to get money from the state?** Even if we want homeschoolers to get the money for use to defray the costs of home education, it is unlikely that such a provision could pass. The argument would go that some people would homeschool just for the money. The REACH Alliance would oppose such a provision since it would lessen the chance of passage of their bill.

3. **Do we want homeschoolers to get money vouchers which we take to our library of choice?** This is an idea which we could propose. I can see us getting good publicity from this position, even if it is not included in the bill.

4. **Do we want homeschoolers to get money vouchers which we take to our public or non-public school of choice?** This is another idea that we could propose. One danger is that public schools could put pressure on homeschoolers to bring the vouchers to them, and then require homeschoolers to participate in some school activities.

Let's have a lively debate on these questions. I believe that we have plenty of time before we have to come to a consensus or agree to disagree. ●

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