

PENNSYLVANIA HOMESCHOOLERS

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A STATEWIDE NETWORK SHARING INFORMATION ABOUT HOME EDUCATION

Bill Introduced to Lower the School Age from 8 to 6 Lobbying Day Against It in Harrisburg October 16

from Howard Richman

On June 12, House Bill 1695 was introduced in the PA Legislature. It passed out of the House Education Committee six days later, and would have passed the House and Senate in June or July as part of the budget compromise except for the efforts of homeschoolers across the state who phoned, visited, and wrote to their legislators.

Its chief sponsor is Rep. Ron Cowell, Chair of the House Education Committee, and the chief force behind it is the Pennsylvania Department of Education (i.e. the Casey administration). This bill would lower the compulsory school entrance age from 8 to 6 and raise the exit age from 17 to 18.

On Wednesday, October 16, soon after the legislators come back to the Capitol, *PA Homeschoolers* has scheduled a lobbying day so that homeschoolers can visit their representatives and senators to oppose this bill.

Part of a Comprehensive Plan

The PA Dept. of Education says that lowering the compulsory school age to 6 is part of a comprehensive early childhood and family education plan involving preschool programs, child care programs, Head Start, Even Start, Early Intervention, and family support programs.

Aimed at "at risk" Students

The Pennsylvania Department of Education holds that lowering the school age would give school districts a tool to force "at risk" children into school at age 6. However they haven't demonstrated that any students are "at risk" because

they enter school later. The only study available, an unpublished study by Joel Erion, suggests that children who enter school later than normal do fine once they enter school.

Arguments Against Lowering the Entrance Age

For copies of our fact sheets on this issue, send an SASE to *PA Homeschoolers*. Our basic arguments are the following:

1. It takes away parental freedom without any evidence that it would be better for the children who now enter school at age 7 or 8.

2. It would require extra work and expense for homeschooling parents of six and seven year olds.

3. It would force homeschooling parents to begin formal studies with six and seven year olds before the children are "ready". Thus it might force home education programs to begin to produce learning disabled children at home, just as the schools do already.

4. It is part of a comprehensive plan to provide baby-sitting in public schools by certified teachers at taxpayers' expense. The only evidence I have seen in favor of pre-school education are the results of Head Start programs that had substantial home-based components. In fact, there is much evidence (read Raymond Moore) that early schooling is often detrimental.

Arguments Against Raising the Exit Age

1. Keeps disruptive teens in school who don't want to be there, making the school situation worse for everyone else.

2. Prevents teens from graduating at age 17 from non-accredited high schools

and home education programs. (The compulsory school age currently does not exempt graduates from non-accredited schools, but this does not matter because few students graduate before the age of 17.)

Here is what you can do:

1. Come to our *PA Homeschoolers* lobbying day in the state Capitol in Harrisburg on Wednesday October 16. Bring your children for an educational experience about the workings of state government. Come promptly at 9 a.m., as most legislators are in their offices available for visits from 9 to 11.

2. Make sure that a homeschooling support group puts you on their phone tree so that you will be notified if this bill is about to come up for a vote.

3. Find out who your state senator and representative are. (You can call the county courthouse to get this information.)

4. Write (or have your children write) letters to Governor Robert P. Casey (225 Main Capitol, Harrisburg PA 17120), your state representative, and your state senator. Please do not send any letter without first having it checked by someone else for errors. Please send copies of letters to Sue Means (3485 South Park Rd., Bethel Park PA 15102) who is collecting testimony on this issue.

5. Try to arrange meetings with the representatives and senators in your district. Invite other homeschoolers to join you at the meetings. These meetings are very effective.

6. Pray that the legislators will come to understand that children need to spend their youth with their families. We are fighting for our children that they may rejoice in the days of their youth (Ecclesiastes 11:9). ●