

SENATE EDUCATION

EXHIBIT NO. 3

DATE 2-14-05

BILL NO. SB-291

In Support of: SB291 Quality Home School and Child Protection Act
Including acceptable amendments.
To: Chairman Ryan, Senators, and visitors:

For the record, I am Donna Maddux, presently employed as Flathead County Superintendent of Schools. On a personal level, I have home schooled one of my children and she has home schooled two of her children. I support a parent's right to nurture and educate a child at home. However, just as public schools must account for the progress of children in their care, home schools have an obligation to society as a whole.

In just three of Montana's 56 counties, Flathead (595), Yellowstone (547) and Fergus (80) we have nearly 1300 registered home students. I stand here to today to tell you these families represent a small percentage of the home school community. By the very fact that they have registered, they are not typical. They are the best of the best.

Myths are being propagated about the entire home school movement based upon the stories of a few selected families like the ones here today. Home School myth is strong language; but I would like to share some particular experiences gained during my 10 years as the legally designated contact for Flathead County, which leads me to that conclusion.

Myth- All home schooled students excel. In my experience about .07% of home schools actually test. Of that number, I have seen the same distribution as found in Public School: Some high, some medium, and some struggling.

First, I want you to know that if you look up Montana Home School on the Internet, you will see that we are listed as having **NO STANDARDS**. We, County Superintendents, hear all the time from new residents who have come here because we have no expectations for home schooling. Can we afford **No STANDARDS!**

All Public School and most Private School children take the Mandated Montana exams in 4th, 8th, and 11th grades. In Flathead county approximately 10% of the registered home schooled children re-enter public school annually. That effects NCLB and potentially effects AYP. Schools funding might be impacted. Why is it unfair to hold all Montana students to the same standard regardless of the manner of their instruction?

County Superintendents are charged by statute to monitor home schooled students. By comparison, Flathead's registered population is one of the larger schools in Montana. Among those students, have been three murders, two violent rapists, and four burglars. The murders testified that their abusive parents liked the total control home schooling gave them over their children's lives. Good home schools are loving, supportive environments and poor ones are slave labor camps.

Who sees the students to report abuse to DPHHS? In Flathead County a man convicted in another state of child abuse...Not alleged...convicted... imarried a woman in Montana and now home schools her children and it's perfectly legal!

Frequently, when the public school begins to demand accountability, parents will home school instead. That is why on the form in my office it reads, "This form indicates compliance with law and isn't proof that an educational program is actually taking place." A teenager was arrested breaking into a parked car. His mother had withdrawn him to home school rather than cooperate with the school's attempt to hold him accountable. When he was arrested he had been on the streets for three months. She had thrown him out when he wasn't any more cooperative with her than with the public school. We see several under 16's who come to "take home school" because it's more socially acceptable than admitting you're allowing your child to drop out.

One morning I arrived in my office to ringing telephones and it continued for hours. The calls came from all over the nation. The callers were asking who many legally home educate in Montana. A woman was in our area with several children and only one was legally hers. A law enforcement officer and I did a welfare check at the request of the relatives of the other children. I requested to see the children and I was told that I was an illusion, I did not exist. This woman didn't believe that it would be in the children's best interest to let them think an illusion had any power over them. The relatives of the children flew in as soon as they could and rescued their children. This particular woman wrote for a national magazine saying she was just teaching "her" children in her own home and I invaded her privacy!

There is inadequate law for the supervision of home schools. Most of my alert calls come from a neighbor, close friend, or family members. Those children at least have an advocate. But, who speaks for the child who is not allowed outdoors. I frequently have a parent call because an estranged spouse is unilaterally "home schooling" and the non custodial parent doesn't believe the child is being educated. I tell those people to re-open their divorce action. There are far more teeth in that than in my trying to verify a real program of home school.

The homeschool parents here today are the best of the best. They are the cream of the crop. They are not typical. After 10 years and many hundreds of students later, the revolving door continues to exist. Child is struggling. Parents are going to fix things and home school. Next year the student is back in public school and further behind. Poor thing struggles, again. And at semester, is again withdrawn to home school. Most parents say they would appreciate a home school coordinator who'll help them with techniques. They want to do better, they just don't know how.

Do parents need to be trained educators? I don't think so; but they have to be coached by someone with adequate skills. Some states require weekly coaching, then bi-weekly or monthly and eventually one annual goal setting, planning meeting. I could accept compromise within SB291; but to not pass it is to devalue a large segment of the youth of Montana.

These children deserve the opportunities other children receive. An education is a civil right for a child. Even some of the people testifying in opposition to this bill today, would agree with me that children are entitled to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

I am happy to provide additional information if the committee desires it.

Thank you. Again, I am Donna Maddux of Flathead County