

February 14, 2005

## Testimony in opposition to SB 291

Senate Education  
EXHIBIT NO. 20  
DATE 2-14-05  
BILL NO. SB-291

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee:

My name is Eric Schiedermayer. I represent the Montana Catholic Conference, the voice for Montana's Roman Catholic bishops in the state legislature, who in turn are the spiritual leaders to over 140,000 Montanans.

I rise in strong opposition to this bill because it undermines and ignores both Catholic teaching and existing Montana law which emphatically state that parents are the primary educators of their children.

A pastoral letter from Pope John Paul II titled "Familiaris Consortio" says, "Parents must be acknowledged as the first and foremost educators of their children. ... The right and duty of parents to give education is essential ... it is irreplaceable and inalienable, and therefore incapable of being entirely delegated to others or usurped by others."

In other words, parents are the first and most important educators of their children. They have both a fundamental *right* and *responsibility* to choose the education best suited to the needs of their children.

This is very much in keeping with existing Montana law. MCA section 20-5-111 states that "a parent has the authority to instruct his child in a home school and is solely responsible for the educational philosophy of the home school; the selection of instructional materials, textbooks and curriculum; and the evaluation of the home school instruction."

Other opponents of this bill will speak to the many practical reasons why the bill is intrusive and unnecessary. They will point out how the bill specifically violates the above-mentioned law, that accountability is adequate under current truancy laws, that for standardized testing to be relevant, the student must ultimately be taught to the test, which effectively dictates a curriculum, and that under existing conditions, home schooled students consistently outscore other students on such standardized tests anyway.

This legislative session is very much focused on education, and this committee has spent considerable time looking at ways to better form Montana's children, not only academically, but also in the human values which build a strong society such as honesty, integrity, faith in God, initiative, compassion and charity. So I close with one last thought from "Familiaris Consortio": "[Parents'] role as educators is so decisive that scarcely anything can compensate for their failure in it. ... The family is the first school of those social virtues which every society needs."

Respectfully submitted,  
Eric Schiedermayer  
Executive Director, Montana Catholic Conference