

SENATE EDUCATION

EXHIBIT NO. 45

DATE 2-14-05

BILL NO. SB-291

Jodie Wright
264 Evans-Riceville Road
Belt, MT 59412

February 1, 2005

Dear Senators,

This is my testimony in response to Senate Bill 291 "The Quality Home School and Child Protection Act" introduced by Senator Ryan. I am a Democrat voter and the following is my viewpoint on why I am in complete opposition to this bill.

We have been homeschooling our daughter, Savannah, for over six months now. I come from a family of educators and our decision to homeschool was not based on anger or fear towards public education. Our decision was based on what we thought was best for Savannah. She is an intelligent girl and has her own unique way of learning. She is very sensitive to sound and learns best in a quiet, intimate setting. We own and operate our own business and are able to make up our work hours. This allows us flexibility that most parents dream about. We wanted to take advantage of that and give our daughter the best possible start in her education. She has come farther in the last six months of homeschool than she did in her entire year of Kindergarten. She has many close friends and an active social life. She is on a swim team and enjoys taking part in extra-curricular activities. She loves being with her mom and dad, and feels more confident now than she ever has.

This is a common feeling amongst the homeschooling families I have met. Thier kids are confident, well-adjusted and extremely social. This bill would negatively affect every one of those families that I know. Some of the concerns and questions I have regarding this bill are:

- 1) If a parent has a college degree, does that ensure that the child is in good hands?
- 2) If a child is learning disabled, is he/she better off in an overcrowded, underfunded program that may or may not be able to suit his/her needs?
- 3) Should children that are homeschooled be forced to follow the public school curriculum just so they can get good test scores?
- 4) Who is going to pay for all of this monitoring and testing?

I understand that there are children out there who are being mistreated and/or abused. Sadly, you don't need any sort of license to become a parent. However, restricting and controlling homeschoolers is not going to stop the small number of people who abuse their children by "hiding out" at home. I ask that you please look closely at the potential impacts of this bill. There are many other ways to make sure our future leaders are getting their chance at success. I believe there is time to come up with something less drastic and expensive. Submitting a portfolio of our childrens' accomplishments, for example, is less intrusive and costly. We can find a way to protect the children in our state if we take the time to work together. Please remember that there are still a great number of parents out there who have the love and energy to help their children become life-long learners. They are willing to sacrifice many things in order to give their kids what they need to become successful, happy adults.

Please oppose SB291. Thank you.

Sincerely,



Jodie Wright

February 14, 2005

SENATE EDUCATION

EXHIBIT NO. 45

DATE 2-14-05

BILL NO. SB-291

Montana Legislature, 2005
Senate Education Committee

Dear Senate Education Committee Members,

Please allow this testimony to serve as my formal objection to SB 291, the Quality Home School and Child Protection Act, for the following reasons:

- The requirements in Section 5 appear to rest on the assumption that either a Montana teaching certificate or a baccalaureate degree makes an individual qualified to teach. With respect to the reasoning behind this assumption, common sense tells us:
 - A teaching certificate is a great indicator of an individual's motivation to teach. But so is the sacrifice of a career and a second income, which homeschoolers make.
 - An individual may hold a degree in Statistics, for example. This does not necessarily qualify him/her to teach math to First Graders.

Certificates and degrees are much easier to track than a person's gifts, interests, and abilities, and for this reason have become benchmarks for teacher quality even before NCLB. But even the professional education community has asked for leniency in this area, due not to the effect such leniency will have on students, but rather to the difficulty of meeting certain requirements, particularly in rural areas. The implication is that quality education in any learning environment is the result of *dedicated* teachers. This dedication, the caring, and lessons learned at the University of Life, albeit hard to measure, usually combine to carry more weight than a certificate, a degree, or whatever requirement the current "powers that be" have mandated.

- Section 7 rests on the assumption that individuals *other than* the home educators (the parents) are more qualified to assess the educational needs of a particular student than that student's parents are.

The decision to homeschool is *the most* important decision a parent ever makes. Once committed, homeschooling parents aim high. We continue to fine-tune our programs to bring out the best in each one of our students; this is one of the advantages of our small class sizes. The individualized attention we are able to provide is every educator's dream! To have a monitor, someone with priorities other than (or in addition to) my children, assessing their progress, when I am the individual intimately acquainted with their particular learning styles and abilities, not to mention the investment and the passionate interest in the outcome, is a waste of taxpayer money.

The fiscal note to SB 291 estimates that 50 licensed teachers will be needed to monitor 993 home schools. The fiscal analysis calculates that every homeschooling family requiring a monitor will be visited each month for 6-8 hours. This approximates a 35-hour work week for each monitor, at \$60,000 per year. The projected cost of this is \$3 million/year, and is to be borne by local school districts.

However, the fiscal note estimates that only 50% of Montana's homeschooling families would require monitoring, then admits that it will be difficult and time consuming to determine this accurately. Will we need more?

Further, determining who is certified, who is degreed, and who would need monitors is an expense not currently included in the fiscal note.

Then, according to Section 7, "the monitor shall report the child's progress to the school district in December and May of each school year." The expenses associated with record keeping and reporting are not mentioned in the fiscal note.

Montana is currently trying to recruit licensed teachers *to teach*. It would be a waste of human *and* monetary resources to implement this program.

Lastly, Section 7 is a privacy issue. What would you be thinking if the Montana Legislature was considering that your home required monitoring? It's not an issue of having nothing to hide; it's an issue of principle.

- Section 8 is perhaps the most contentious. While I can understand why lawmakers would support some means to measure the progress of homeschooled students, I also acknowledge that teaching to a standardized test violates a parent's right to choose their child's curriculum. The Center for Policy Alternatives elucidates the reasons professional educators object to standardized tests. Why extend this flawed program to cover homeschoolers? What have homeschoolers done to merit this?

To those who may wonder how homeschooling parents can possibly know what they're doing when they're not "professionals," this letter is an appeal to principle and common sense. Homeschooling parents have and utilize an amazing array of resources, and, more importantly, *they care* about raising children who will be respectful, productive, successful, and happy. This puts us on par with any professional educator. We just do it a little differently. Homeschoolers should be respected for this, just as those around us are respected for their perceived differences.

There is simply no evidence to support that Montana's homeschoolers need to be tested. There is no *real* logic to the proposal that parents be degreed or licensed in order to teach their own children, or else be monitored. Therefore, SB 291, while well-intentioned, is unnecessary.

On the other hand, there is sufficient evidence indicating that the public school system could really use all of the resources that they have available. There is only so much to go around, whether the money comes from the general fund, the counties, or the local districts. Why deprive the kids who really need what Montana's taxpayers have provided, while inconveniencing homeschoolers and spending precious funds unnecessarily?

I urge you to reject SB 291.

Respectfully,

Colleen Turk

Colleen Turk
Kalispell, MT

addendum following Senator Ryan's testimony:

Answer to Senator Ryan's challenge:

An ad campaign, similar to the anti-drug campaign, etc, targeting homeschoolers, could be a caring, respectful, & less expensive solution to the problem of irresponsible parents claiming to be homeschoolers.

*("Homeschoolers, know the law!
Be sure you're home
schooling!")*

(Education, not legislation.)