

Fortune 500 Company: Homeschoolers Need Not Apply

NiSource, Inc., an Indiana-based energy distribution group with operations in Ohio, told the Home School Legal Defense Association that the company will not hire home-school graduates. In response to numerous letters written in an attempt to resolve a dispute over a particular job applicant whose job offer had been rescinded because he was home-schooled, NiSource Senior Counsel Adele O'Connor told me that NiSource "disagrees with the conclusions in your letter as to the legal requirements regarding a diploma. These requirements are set forth in Chapter 3313 of the Ohio Revised Code."

However, this section of the code applies to public and chartered private schools, not home-schools. NiSource is wrongly using Ohio law as an excuse to defend its discriminatory hiring policy. There is simply no legal impediment to NiSource hiring a home-school graduate—especially the one in question here. Ohio law clearly recognizes home-schooling as a legal and valid educational option. To rescind an offer of employment to an otherwise qualified and experienced applicant who received a legally recognized education is unreasonable and discriminatory.

Well-Qualified

This applicant was offered a job initially, but NiSource withdrew the offer when it found out he had a home-school diploma. In addition to graduating from home-school in compliance with Ohio law, this applicant had years of relevant job experience and several key industry certifications. During his last two years of high school the applicant took seven courses at a recognized state college and made the dean's list.

Although we are usually able to resolve problems related to home-school diplomas with employers and higher education officials, many human resources or admissions officials misunderstand Ohio law which recognizes home-schooling as a legal and valid form of education.

HSLDA has been working with home-school advocates in Ohio to seek legislative action to prevent this kind of discrimination. The problem may indicate more than just discrimination against home-schoolers. This situation reflects the precise concern that motivates HSLDA's opposition to the Common Core and its "college- and career-ready" standards—that qualified home-school graduates who don't have a state-issued credential will be discriminated against in employment decisions.

A National Scheme

The Common Core has been adopted in Ohio and is moving forward in the face of fierce opposition from grassroots activists—parents and educators who reject a nationalized education system that includes national standards and associated nationalized assessments and a national student data collection scheme. HSLDA opposes Common Core because it creates a system based on nationalized standards, assessment and data collection that could negatively affect home-school graduates and job seekers. Research indicates that home-schooled students are well prepared academically and socially for careers and college. But even if this is true, hiring decisions should be made based on an individual's qualifications, not a policy that discriminates against an entire class of people based on how they were educated.

HSLDA affirms the right of private companies to create their own hiring policies, which may include evaluating the academic credentials of prospective applicants. However, NiSource's discriminatory practice reflects a narrow-minded and statist view of education that is inconsistent with the values of a

free society. In a free economy, companies have the right to hire those of their choosing; just as individuals have the right to decide who they work for and purchase from.

NiSource has a "contact us" form online. Home-schoolers may wish to take the opportunity to explain to the company why refusing to hire home-schoolers is not just bad policy, it is bad business.