

Illinois Homeschool Bill May Criminalize Parents

A proposed bill in Illinois is drawing sharp criticism from lawmakers and families alike for potentially criminalizing parents who homeschool their children. House Bill 2827, dubbed the “Homeschool Act,” would require parents to register with their local public school through a “homeschool declaration form,” with failure to comply punishable by a misdemeanor.

Democratic State Representative La Shawn Ford, who represents parts of Chicago, joined critics Thursday during a rally in downtown Chicago. “This bill is a pipeline to the criminal justice system for parents,” Ford said. “How can we criminalize parents for wanting to love their children?”

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The bill also mandates that homeschooled children meet the same immunization and health examination requirements as public school students if they wish to participate in extracurricular activities. In addition, the legislation would require private schools to submit student contact information to the state, a move opponents call government overreach.

Critics argue that the bill undermines parental rights and disproportionately targets minority communities, where homeschooling has seen significant growth. Since the pandemic, the percentage of Black families in Illinois choosing homeschooling has grown from 3.3% to nearly 17%, according to Ford.

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Bobby Sylvester, vice president of the Urban Center, warned that the legislation would allow state intrusion into private

education. "This bill would require private schools to hand over names, phone numbers, and addresses. That is government overreach," he said.

Supporters, including the bill's sponsor, Democratic Rep. Terra Costa Howard, argue that stronger oversight is necessary. The legislation follows a ProPublica report alleging that Illinois' lax homeschooling regulations failed to catch cases of child abuse. The bill includes a provision allowing the state to request teaching materials if there's suspicion a child is not being properly educated.

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Opponents counter that no evidence links homeschooling to a higher risk of abuse than public schooling. Homeschooling advocates say the bill could force parents to keep children in failing or unsafe schools due to fear of prosecution.

Chantal Moore, a mother whose autistic son thrives in a homeschool environment, said, "Keeping our children safe is not acquired by a form, but by standing as a community together."

Aziza Butler, a former public school teacher and homeschooling mother of six, added that the bill threatens educational freedom and misdirects resources away from struggling public schools.

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