

Jail Time for Homeschoolers? Lawmakers Advance Bill Despite 'Historic' Opposition

Hundreds of homeschooling parents in Illinois are protesting a bill that would require them to comply with additional oversight for home instruction, and if they don't, they could face jail time.

House Bill 2827, known as the Homeschool Act, advanced out of the Education Policy Committee by a vote of 8-4 Wednesday, despite more than 42,000 people signing witness slips opposing it.

"We chose to homeschool our children for a reason, and it's very important to us. And our freedom to continue to do that is what we will continue to fight for," homeschool parent Lisa Edison told ABC7.

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The bill, sponsored by Democratic state Rep. Terra Costa Howard, would tack on additional requirements for parents that some say is a "gross overreach of what the state should be allowed to do."

The bill would require the State Board of Education to create a "Homeschool Declaration Form," which essentially registers a child with the nearest public school. The children of parents who fail to comply with this mandate will be considered "truant, with penalties applying."

Additionally, a regional office of education or school district can request a parent submit a portfolio of their child's work portfolio which would include writing samples,

workbooks, worksheets or other logs of curricular materials.

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If parents or guardians do not comply, they could face up to a Class C misdemeanor, punishable by up to 30 days in jail.

Will Estrada, senior counsel for the Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA), told Fox News that this bill is only the beginning of bureaucrats' ability to "write different sections of regulations."

"If this bill is passed into law, it's going to be expanded in future years to put even more restrictions on homeschool and private school families," Estrada said after testifying at Wednesday's hearing. "The record of homeschoolers shows that we do well academically, socially, emotionally and so why are we messing with them? That's the question. This bill is a solution in search of a problem."

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Costa Howard says she introduced the bill to ensure that children "don't fall through the cracks."

"Education is a fundamental right for every child, but we have a duty to make sure children actually receive an education. This is not something we want to be an outlier on," Costa Howard said.

Lawmakers point to a single documented case of L.J., a 9-year-old whose parents decided to homeschool him after he missed so much school and was faced with potentially repeating the third grade, ABC7 reports.

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