

New Bill Would Offer Persecuted Homeschoolers Asylum

Amid the immigration debate in Washington, D.C., a new bill would make it possible for families who are persecuted for homeschooling to find refuge in the United States. This legislation was developed by HSLDA along with supportive members of Congress in the wake of the Romeike family's 2013 asylum case after they fled their home country of Germany under the threat of fines and imprisonment for homeschooling their children. Introduced as H.R. 1153, the Asylum Reform and Border Protection Act of 2015, the bill is scheduled for a vote in the House Judiciary Committee this week.

"We did not want to have to leave our home in Germany in order to homeschool," Uwe Romeike explained. "But when we were harshly treated, America opened its doors to us. America has become our new home. We want to be citizens of this great country, and we are so grateful to the congressmen for writing this bill."

Michael Farris, HSLDA's chairman, who argued before the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals on behalf of the Romeike family, was pleased with the congressional action. "No one should be forced to flee their homeland in order to homeschool," Farris said. "But that is what the Romeikes and scores of other families have had to do in order to escape crushing fines, criminal penalties and even the seizure of their children in countries like Germany and Sweden. Homeschooling is no threat to free societies, and I applaud the Congress for taking action so that families like the Romeikes and others who experience ill treatment may find refuge and legal status in the land of the free."

H.R. 1153 sponsor, Rep. Jason Chaffetz (UT), original cosponsors Daniel Webster (Florida) and Rep. Robert Goodlatte (Virginia), chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, have included specific language that would allow up to 500 grants of asylum per year to family members fleeing homeschool persecution. The Romeike family would be able to reopen their case under the proposed law. Among the measure's changes to the Immigration and Nationality Act, it would also require the U.S. Attorney General to hire at least 50 more immigration judges, making it easier for families who come to the U.S. because of homeschooling to be granted asylum.

The bill explicitly refers to homeschooling as a particular social group and specifies that a person is deemed to be eligible for asylum if he or she is persecuted for homeschooling or if the person resists anti-homeschooling laws in his country of origin. The House Judiciary Committee is scheduled to discuss the bill on Tuesday and Wednesday of this week.

H.R. 1153 is scheduled to be heard on Wednesday, March 4, in the Judiciary Committee Room (2141) at the Rayburn House Office Building starting at 10 AM. HSLDA plans to hold a press conference after the bill passes committee, sometime Wednesday afternoon. Mr. Romeike is planning to attend the markup and press conference.

Home School Legal Defense Association is a nonprofit advocacy organization established to defend and advance the constitutional right of parents to direct the education of their children and to protect family freedoms. Visit us online at .