

Members of the House Education Policy Committee,

I am Kirsten Nelson and I am writing in opposition of House File 874 and ask you to reject the bill. Implications are unclear and terms are vague, and these pose many problems in the execution of the bill. Legislators should not legislate bills that take away rights we currently have and enjoy, and I feel this could be an unintended consequence of the bill as written.

HF874 New Constitutional Language Proposed:

“All children have a fundamental right to a quality public education that fully prepares them with the skills necessary for participation in the economy, our democracy, and society, as measured against uniform achievement standards set forth by the state. It is a paramount duty of the state to ensure quality public schools that fulfill this fundamental right.”

I reference the Testimony for Minnesota Senate E-12 Finance and Policy Committee from: David M. Watkins, former Executive Director of MACHE (Minnesota Association of Christian Home Educators) dated Friday, March 6, 2020 for many detailed concerns with which I fully agree. Please be sure to reference this testimony as though it were part of my letter as well.

We home educated our children by choice and feel that the option for parents to choose a means of educating their children other than public education must be preserved, specifically the right to home educate their children. I am also a pediatrician and while I do agree that public education has many areas for improvement, I believe that the stated objectives should be managed at the school district level and should not require a vague amendment. I believe that parents should retain parental rights to make decisions about their child's education. Any effort to improve the public education system should clearly and unequivocally state that the right for parents to choose is preserved and private and home education are respected means of education.

This bill comes before you on March 8 in the era of COVID and the public health response to send children home from school. Circumstances led to reactionary emergency management and not planned execution of an intentional plan. Unprepared parents, unprepared teachers and school systems, lack of technology, the combination of crises (drastic changes to life at work and home and school) and the constant barrage of negativity and focus on failures (real or imagined) contributed to a horrible experience. Public education at home during COVID is no reflection on home education. They are unrelated, and to imply the failure of public education at home is a failure of home education is unequivocally false. There was nothing about public education at home that was comparable to home education other than the fact that public education took place in a home. Home education has been proven to be successful – and in most cases and by most measures more successful than public education. To use this past year as a reason to mandate public education for all is based on false data and assumptions and is an invasion of parental rights that must be preserved.

I urge you to reject the bill as it is written. Thank you for your time.

Kirsten Nelson, MD and home educator
1514 Firemans Lodge Road SW, Alexandria MN 56308