

From: Rebecca S. Jaenchen, Medina, MN

Date: Saturday, March 6, 2021

Re: Written testimony regarding HF874 for 3/8/21 hearing in House Education Policy Committee

I am writing as a concerned Minnesota voter and parent to encourage you to reject this proposed amendment to the Minnesota Constitution. This proposal is concerning to me for several reasons:

1. Our current constitution uses clear language in regard to this issue, whereas the proposed language introduces confusion and the opportunity for abuse of power by the state towards parents' ability to direct the education of their children. The term "fundamental right" is mentioned twice in the proposed amendment; however this term appears nowhere in the Minnesota Constitution, the United States Constitution, or the Declaration of Independence. Use of this term places in jeopardy families who choose a private education or homeschooling for their children which is their right.
2. Secondly, the term "quality" appears in this amendment several times. However, it would appear that the definition of "quality" would rest with the state rather than the parent. Again, parents should be the final decision makers regarding what they believe constitutes "quality" as it relates to their children's education, not the state. Parents have a much higher vested interest in the quality of education their children receive than does the state, and should therefore be the primary directors of their education.
3. The proposed amendment utilizes the terminology "fully prepare." Who should be deciding what constitutes a child being "fully prepared"? Parents have infinitely more intimate knowledge of the abilities, talents, inclinations, interests, personalities, strengths, and weaknesses of their child than the state government could ever have, and are therefore the most supremely qualified to make determinations for their child about what "fully prepared" means for each unique person. The suggestion that the state can make this determination better strips children of their agency to chart their course for the future under the careful guidance of their parents.

4. The proposed amendment refers to our form of government as a “democracy”. Our form of government at both the state and federal level is certainly not a democracy, but rather a republican government with the ramifications that accompany that distinction.
5. Uniform achievement standards pigeon hole children into a one-size-fits-all model that does harm to many children who do not thrive in a traditional public school setting. Often, these same children do thrive in alternative models of learning. This must remain a hallmark of educational opportunity in Minnesota. This amendment does damage to this foundational principle.
6. This amendment is absolutely unnecessary and detrimental. Currently, parents are the primary directors of their children’s education. The language in this amendment would strip parents (and secondarily, the local school districts) of this role and put the state in control of education.
7. If the authors’ intent is to fix broken public school systems, they have the ability to exercise oversight over them now without altering the constitution. Local school boards are elected to drill down on the areas within their districts that require improvement. Nothing in the current constitution bars them and the legislature from taking these actions. Instead, this proposed amendment only serves to create new problems through ambiguity and loss of local control.

This proposed amendment weakens parents’ rights to direct the education of their unique student giving more control to the state which does not have the ability to effectively know and understand the particular traits, strengths, and weaknesses of each child.

I strongly encourage you to reject this amendment to the Minnesota Constitution.