



Fact Sheet on Amendment to Wisconsin Budget Providing Tax Credits for Homeschoolers

The budget bill currently awaiting action by the Governor contains a surprise amendment added at the last minute that would provide homeschoolers (and other private school students) with a tax credit of \$100 per child per year. Homeschoolers working together through WPA have consistently opposed government funding, including education tax deductions and tax credits, because it would provide increased opportunity for state regulation of homeschooling. WPA mailed postcards to members early in July encouraging homeschoolers to contact Legislators and the Governor. Many homeschoolers have made calls and sent letters and emails, most opposing tax credits for homeschoolers. Thank you to all who have responded.

Here is more information about this issue. It provides details that would not fit on the postcards and clarifies some misinformation that has been circulating.

- **Some other states, including Illinois and Minnesota, already offer tax credits for homeschoolers.** These tax credits do not provide the benefits to homeschoolers that some supporters of the amendment claim. The Illinois tax credit is designed for conventional schools and does not work well for homeschoolers. Very few homeschoolers in Illinois qualify for the tax credits and even fewer file the paperwork to claim the tax credit because doing so would put their homeschooling freedoms at risk. For details, see <http://www.homeschoolfreedom.org/class.pdf> Illinois' Christian Liberty Academy's PDF.

It doesn't work to compare tax credit proposals in Wisconsin with those available in Minnesota because Minnesota already has greater regulation of homeschoolers than does Wisconsin, so Minnesota homeschoolers have already lost many of the freedoms we still have. Homeschooled young people in Minnesota are required to take annual norm-referenced, standardized achievement tests every year with consequences for anyone who falls below the 30th percentile. All homeschoolers are required to submit annual reports; parents who do not have a bachelor's degree must also submit quarterly reports. Because the local superintendent or someone they designate may visit homeschooling families once a year (or more frequently if there is any evidence that a family is not complying with the law), families need to have available documentation showing that they are complying with the compulsory school

attendance law, including "class schedules, copies of materials used for instruction, and descriptions of methods used to assess student achievement." Because the statutes are subject to interpretation by school districts and homeschoolers, there is some variation in how they are enforced in different parts of the state. However, it's clear that homeschoolers in MN are much more strongly regulated than we are in Wisconsin.

In short, one cannot look to either Illinois or Minnesota (or any other state that WPA knows of) for evidence that tax credits benefit homeschoolers without costing them significant homeschooling freedoms.

- **States that have education tax credits that are designed for homeschoolers either had strong and unreasonable state regulations governing homeschooling before the tax credits were passed or increased their regulation of homeschoolers after the tax credits were passed.**

- **As stated on the WPA postcards, there is no such thing as a free lunch.** Education tax credits for homeschoolers would lead to increased pressure for more information on our PI-1206 forms (such as children's names, birth dates, and social security numbers), review of homeschooling by school officials, and requirements that homeschoolers take state-mandated tests, which would mean having to choose a curriculum that is consistent with the principles and beliefs of public schools so our children would be prepared for the tests.

If tax credits for homeschoolers were adopted, WPA would strongly oppose any increase in regulation of homeschooling. The current statutes do not authorize the DPI to require names, birth dates, and social security numbers on PI-1206 forms. But lack of statutory authority might not prevent the DPI from doing it anyway. (The first form the DPI issued in 1984 exceeded the authority they had been granted by statute. WPA representatives and legislators met with DPI officials to convince them to change the form.) If the statutes allowed homeschoolers to claim tax credits, WPA would not be able to make as strong a case as it could in 1984 when there were no such tax credits.

- **Some supporters of tax credits argue that homeschoolers are entitled to tax credits for education because we pay taxes that support public schools that our children do not attend.** They claim this means homeschoolers pay double for their children's

educations, once when they pay taxes that go to schools and again when they cover homeschooling expenses. Such thinking fails to understand the whole point of taxes. Citizens pay taxes so services are available for people in the community who need or choose to use them. As homeschoolers, we pay for many services that we don't plan to use in addition to public schools. We pay for jails, fire departments, police departments, etc. We pay for roads we may never drive on and parks we may never visit. One way to avoid having citizens pay for services they do not use would be to require everyone to use the services. Being required to send our children to public schools is not something homeschoolers want!

- **Some supporters of tax credits claim that homeschoolers do not need to be concerned because tax credits are not mandatory.** In other words, homeschoolers can decide not to claim the tax credits. Our concern is not being forced to pay lower taxes! Experience in other states and countries has shown that when homeschoolers have the opportunity to accept benefits if they want to and such benefits open the door to increased regulation of homeschooling, the regulations are applied to all homeschoolers, not just those who accept the benefits. In other words, if tax credits lead to increased regulation of homeschooling in Wisconsin, we will not be able to avoid the new regulations by refusing to accept the tax credits.

- **Homeschoolers have been asking why we had no warning that tax credits for homeschoolers were being included in the budget bill.** Basically, we got caught in the political maneuvering that surrounds the final passage of the budget bill. Tax credits for homeschoolers were part of a secret, 28-page amendment to the budget bill that was part of the negotiations and compromises that are part of the political process. The secret amendment was introduced in the Wisconsin Senate at approximately 4:35 AM on July 1, 2005. Tax credits for homeschoolers and other provisions in the amendment were only discussed for 30 minutes. The amendment was passed at 5:05 AM, followed by the entire \$54 billion budget 11 minutes later. Obviously, there was little time for thoughtful consideration of this and other provisions in the amendment. Hearings were not held on the idea of tax credits for homeschoolers.

- **As homeschoolers, we are at greater risk of increased regulation following a tax credit than some other groups would be.** There are several groups that are waiting for an opportunity to increase regulations. Some public school officials want homeschoolers involved in public schools some way other, even if it just means that we have to report to school officials, so we can boost their enrollment figures and therefore their budget. Some misguided social workers feel that the few rare cases of families abusing the homeschooling law mean that all homeschoolers should be under greater regulation, even though such regulation would not solve the tragic problems of truancy and child abuse. It would be safer for farmers who grow sweet corn or businesses who sponsor community sports teams to accept tax credits than it would be for homeschoolers because there's no significant pressure for increased regulation of either sweet corn or community sports.

- **Unfortunately, the Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA), a national homeschooling organization based in Virginia, has gotten itself involved in this issue by supporting tax credits for homeschoolers,** despite the fact that homeschoolers working together through WPA have made it clear to HSLDA that we do not need or want their help. Their involvement is threatening to divide homeschoolers, something that small minorities try to avoid so they can maintain their effectiveness. It is very inappropriate for people to come into a state from the outside without regard for the history, achievements, and knowledge of homeschoolers and of existing state organizations. HSLDA was not involved in the passage of Wisconsin's very reasonable homeschooling law in 1984. By contrast, states in which HSLDA has been involved in the passage of homeschooling laws, such as PA, NY, and NH, ended up with some of the most restrictive homeschooling laws in the country and continue to have difficulty with their laws. WPA has consistently maintained that the people who live in a state, who understand its history and its political climate, and who will have to live under that laws that are passed, should be the ones who handle challenges that arise in their state. Pleased as we are with the homeschooling law that Wisconsin has, we have not tried to convince any other state to adopt a similar one, although we do give information to people from other states who call and ask for it.

Hopefully these additional details will help homeschoolers understand why WPA is so strongly opposed to tax credits for homeschoolers and to interference from organizations from outside the state. Please let us know if you want to discuss this further or need additional information. Thank you to all the homeschoolers who are working together through WPA to prevent tax credits from being enacted.

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