



Wisconsin Parents Association Newsletter

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wpa@homeschooling-wpa.org • www.homeschooling-wpa.org • 608-283-3131

Legislative Watch

Late on January 29th, Rep. Christine Sinicki (D - Milwaukee) submitted a request to the Joint Legislative Council Committee requesting a Legislative Study Committee to review Wisconsin's homeschooling law. In her request, she sites concerns of abuse and neglect by homeschooling parents as her cause for this request.

There are several reasons why this study committee is not good for Wisconsin homeschoolers. One is that the Joint Legislative Council's website states that their "primary responsibility is to establish study committees to study major issues and problems identified by the Legislature." Homeschooling is not a problem or major issue that needs a legislative solution.

In WPA's response to abuse and regulation (see page 4), WPA points out why additional regulation of homeschooling is not an appropriate response to abuse, including these points:

- There is no evidence to suggest that homeschooling is a risk factor for child abuse.
- There is no evidence to suggest that increased regulation of homeschooling results in lower rates of child abuse.
- Child Protective Services are equipped to intervene in any situation where they feel a child is being harmed.
- Homeschoolers who follow their states' homeschooling laws should not face additional scrutiny because of the educational choice they have made for their children.
- It is not logical to assume that if abusive parents aren't following the laws that are already in place, they would follow additional laws.

In the face of this request, we asked homeschoolers for action. Thank you to all who called the Co-chairs and the Committee Members.

The Joint Legislative Council receives many study requests. When all of the requests have been received, the Co-chairs narrow down the number of requests and they will then present the short list of those requests they are suggesting for study to the entire committee for approval. At this time, we are waiting for the Committee to announce which requests have made it to the short list of those that will be studied.

We are hopeful that homeschooling will not be seen as a problem that requires study. As always, we will update our members as soon as we have any new information. Please direct people to the Current Issues section of our website for more information.

Remembering Joe King

In December of 2017, long-time WPA board member Joe King passed away. Many of you will likely remember Joe's warm greeting at the WPA Conference, where he enjoyed welcoming everyone who attended. Joe, along with his wife Fay, were founding members of WPA. Joe served on the WPA Board since its inception and as Board President for over 25 years. The board will miss his wisdom and wit. We remember him with gratitude for all that he did for homeschooling freedom in Wisconsin and with fondness for his kindness and humor.

Did You Know?

Does my local school district receive money for my child even though he/she is homeschooled?

No. In Wisconsin, public schools receive most of their funding from state aid and property taxes. State equalization aid is distributed to school districts based, in part, on the number of students enrolled in the public schools on certain dates during the school year. Since a homeschooled student is not enrolled in a public school, the child's resident school district is not allowed to count that child in its enrollment count for the purposes of claiming state aid. As a homeschooler, there are no state funds allocated to your school district on behalf of your child.

What's In A Name?

Why it is important to protect the name “homeschooling”

In the fall of 2017, WPA became aware that there was a virtual charter school company in partnership with a Wisconsin school district that was marketing itself to Wisconsin students as an “accredited homeschooling” program.

These schools were clearly public schools and not homeschooling by law or practice. WPA brought this discrepancy to the attention of the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (responsible for the oversight of public schools). The Department of Public Instruction (DPI) was receptive to our concerns.

After careful communication with the DPI, the websites and social media pages of the virtual school company have been updated to reflect the fact that these programs *are not homeschooling*.

There are several reasons that it is important to maintain the distinction between homeschooling and virtual charter schools (public schools). There is a great deal of confusion about the differences between legal homeschooling and virtual charter schools, even by those enrolled in these public school programs.

When virtual charter schools began, WPA voiced its concern about these programs as well as the importance of NOT calling them homeschooling. Homeschooling parents take full responsibility for their children’s education. Virtual charter school students must comply with public school standards and requirements. However, since these public school students study at home, legislators and the general public often confuse these two very different types of education. In fact, virtual charter school families themselves are often confused by the differences and refer to themselves as homeschoolers.

It is imperative that the distinction between homeschooling and public school at home be maintained. If there is not a clear distinction between the two, homeschoolers risk the introduction of laws that would require homeschoolers to comply with public school standards.

Each homeschooling family can protect our current homeschooling law by knowing the differences between homeschooling and virtual charter schools (see our chart online under the Public Schools FAQ “What about online virtual schools?”) and by being able to speak clearly about the responsibilities and requirements of homeschoolers in Wisconsin. In addition, homeschooling families must homeschool responsibly, be legally compliant, not offer more information to school or state officials than is required, and speak up when someone refers to a virtual charter school as homeschooling in order to protect homeschooling from being confused with virtual charter schools.

WPA is committed to maintaining the distinctions between homeschooling and these public school programs and thereby protecting the freedom that homeschoolers have in Wisconsin.

Public Dollars Put Wisconsin Homeschooling Law At Risk

We have a unique situation in Wisconsin that homeschoolers in most other states do not have. We have an enormous amount of freedom to homeschool in whatever way works for our family as long as we follow our reasonable homeschool law.

In order to maintain the freedom that Wisconsin homeschoolers have enjoyed since 1984, we must say no to government money and special treatment for homeschoolers that will lead to additional regulation.

1. All government favors come with the requirement of accountability. Taxpayers are right to expect accountability for how our tax dollars are spent.
2. In order to maintain our current homeschooling law, we must forgo tax credits, educational vouchers, and/or other types of privileged considerations to homeschoolers
3. In other states where these types of “benefits” are offered to homeschoolers they come with regulation such as mandatory testing, curriculum approval, special qualifications for homeschooling parents, and/or oversight of homeschoolers by local school districts.

What we have to lose is much greater than what we have to gain.

2018 Conference—May 4 & 5 in Stevens Point

This year's conference celebrates the **35th anniversary of Wisconsin Parents Association**. The theme of this year's conference is a direct result of the questions that homeschoolers in Wisconsin have brought to us over the past couple of years. Our conference is special in that **ALL of the presenters are WPA members**. Our conference is BY Wisconsin homeschoolers, FOR Wisconsin homeschoolers.

This year's theme, *Authentic Homeschooling in the Information Age*, speaks to the idea that we are living in a new world of possibilities **and** we are seeking to remain true to the visions we have for our own families.

The workshop topics are meant to inform, inspire, and challenge you. The social time is designed to allow you to ask questions of your fellow homeschoolers, rekindle friendships from past conferences, and make new connections.

One of the highlights is always the Graduation Recognition Ceremony where parents have the opportunity to recognize the efforts and accomplishments of their children in an environment composed entirely of other homeschoolers.

The Connections area is another part of what makes our conference special. Connections is open all day on Saturday and is a place to hang out with other homeschoolers while making, playing, and inventing. This year there will be electronic take-aparts, ink-dyeing, games, and more.

Wisconsin Parents Association does not exist without its members. Our mission is to provide legislative watch and accurate up-to-date information so that our members can do the homeschooling. **Come to the conference—it is yours.**

Please hang the enclosed poster somewhere in your community, help us spread the word. Early-bird registration ends April 2, conference registration closes April 20th.

The Future Of WPA

Homeschooling has changed dramatically over the last 35 years. Homeschooling is more prevalent, more socially and institutionally acceptable, and the different ways that families homeschool has increased exponentially, especially since the internet has become a part of our everyday lives.

The WPA Board feels that in order to successfully preserve Wisconsin homeschooling law, homeschoolers must make a commitment to their fellow homeschoolers. WPA must be a dynamic, evolving, and dedicated group of people with changing roles and changing ideas, all committed to protecting the rights of homeschooling families to provide an education to their children according to their own principles and beliefs.

Consequently, the board has decided to return to a volunteer model which includes a working board and an all volunteer organization starting in 2019. This is a big change for WPA.

Going back to our roots as an all volunteer organization is something that will allow more people to share the work and knowledge of protecting homeschooling freedom in Wisconsin, which means less work for each person and many more people leading WPA as we move forward.

What will not change: **WPA is committed to our mission of protecting the right of parents to provide an education to their children according to their own principles and beliefs.** We will continue to do this through legislative watch and the dissemination of accurate, up-to-date information about homeschooling in Wisconsin.

We will update all our members via email as changes take place. **Please come to the Member Meeting at the conference to find out more and share your ideas and volunteer your time.** WPA is YOU.

WPA is always looking for fantastic volunteers. If you are interested in being a part of our Legislative Watch Committee contact WPA for more information. If you are interested in learning more about WPA and/or serving on the WPA Board of Directors, please come to a board meeting. All board meetings are posted on the website under About Us. **All current members are always welcome at board meetings.** If you have other skills to volunteer, please contact us. As we make this important transition, we will have many opportunities for volunteers. Consider being a part of the future of WPA!

WPA Response To Abuse And Regulation

Child abuse is never acceptable in any situation. Laws are currently in place that make the abuse of children illegal and legally punishable, and that allow authorities to remove children from unsafe environments, no matter where those children are being educated.

Many public statements recently suggest that there should be additional regulation of homeschooling to prevent child abuse. Anecdotes used to illustrate the need for increased regulation of homeschooling are overwhelmingly stories of families who were already in contact with Child Protective Services. These cases do not represent a failure of homeschooling—they represent a failure on the part of a system already in place to do what is necessary to protect children who are known to be at risk.

There is no statistical evidence that children who are homeschooled are at greater risk of abuse. There is no evidence that tighter regulation of homeschooling would in any way affect child abuse statistics. There are laws in place to prevent child abuse and deal with abuse when it is found. Flaws in this system are not the result of homeschooling and would not be remedied by creating additional homeschooling regulation.

Talking points for this issue:

- There is no evidence to suggest that homeschooling is a risk factor for child abuse.
- There is no evidence to suggest that increased regulation of homeschooling results in lower rates of child abuse.
- Child Protective Services are equipped to intervene in any situation where they feel a child is being harmed.
- Homeschoolers who follow their states' homeschooling laws should not face additional scrutiny because of the educational choice they have made for their children.
- It is not logical to assume that if abusive parents aren't following the laws that are already in place, they would follow additional laws.

Wisconsin Parents Association cares deeply for the well-being of children. We all have our own reasons for homeschooling, and we must all stand together to support homeschooling families who choose to take responsibility for the education of their children.

It is up to all of us to be informed about these issues and to use our voices to let people know that these horrific situations do not reflect the homeschooling community.

This article was originally published online January 28, 2018

Authentic Homeschooling in the Information Age

Wisconsin Parents Association

35th Anniversary Conference
and Resource Fair

May 4-5, 2018

Stevens Point, WI

Information and registration

www.homeschooling-wpa.org

