

PENNSYLVANIA HOMESCHOOLERS

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Harrisburg Eleventh Hour Action Plan for SB 154

The new homeschooling bill, Senate Bill 154, will pass in the House and Senate in Harrisburg sometime between November 15th and the end of November, unless the lobbies of the educational establishment can stop it. We don't have a host of paid lobbyists, so we will need you to come to Harrisburg one more time. If you are from the Harrisburg area, maybe you can come in more than once.

Here is our plan. We want our presence to be felt in the Capitol Rotunda every day the House and Senate is in session from November 15th until the bill passes. **We are planning for the 5 most likely days. November 15, 16, 21, 22, and 23.** We will set up a Parent Educators of Pennsylvania literature table from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. in the rotunda. We will have Parent Educators of Pennsylvania name tags for everyone so that we will be visible in the corridors. We want parents and children packing the gallery watching the House and Senate in action. We want people checking with their Representatives and Senators (and the other people in their legislators' offices) and letting them know that we are there.

A different home-schooling leader will be in charge of each day. Once you pick which day you will come, call or write to the person in charge by November 10th so that he can put together a phone tree (be sure to tell them your phone number). If there are specific plans for that day, the leader can call you with a phone message. If the bill has already passed both the House and the Senate, the leader will call you so that you will not have to waste a trip. Even if you can't go, you can help tremendously just by calling the leader and offering to help with that day's phone tree. It should be an educational experience for you and your children to see the legislature enact the new homeschooling law.

If you will be coming to Harrisburg from far away and need a place to stay overnight, or if you live in Harrisburg and are willing to put people up, call or write to Jim Gustafson (717-697-8429) 1010 Apache Trail, Mechanicsburg, PA 17055 by November 10th.

Leaders for the five days are:

Tuesday, Nov. 15 --
Alan Koch (412-531-6426)
126 Woodhaven Dr.
Mt. Lebanon, PA 15228

Wednesday, Nov. 16 --
Jay Snyder (717-859-1630)
6 Echo Valley Dr.
Ephrata, PA 17522

Monday, Nov. 21 --
Bob Finley (717-921-8345)
1310 Narrow Lane
Dauphin, PA 17018

Tuesday, Nov. 22 --
Jim Means (412-854-4188)
3485 South Park Rd.
Bethel Park, PA 15102

Wednesday, Nov. 23 --
Tom Murphy (215-822-3253)
823 Church Rd.,
Hatfield, PA 19440

Homeschooling Bill on Verge of Passage from Howard Richman

We, in Pennsylvania, are fighting a very tough battle. It is David vs. Goliath all over again. We are a small group fighting for the right to teach our children more effectively than the schools. Arrayed against us are the Pennsylvania Department of Education and the organized lobbies of the educational establishment. We don't have any paid lobbyists or campaign funds to throw around, all we have is the slingshot of truth.

The story is partly about some of the legislators of integrity who are helping us including Republican Representative Joe Pitts, who sponsored our original homeschooling bills in 1985 and 1987, and who has constantly guided us with his wisdom, and Rep. Ron Cowell, the Democratic Chair of the House Education Committee, who has put together a compromise bill which respects both parents right to choose home education and protects the children's right to

receive an education. Although a strong supporter of public education, he listened to our concerns when his committee held hearings on December 3rd. In the May 22nd edition of The Pittsburgh Press reporter Don Wolf wrote:

Cowell is convinced that most home schooling parents have "an exceptional interest in their children and are willing to commit extraordinary amounts of time to their children.... The kids are obviously exceptional," said Cowell.

In the same article Dr. William Logan, state deputy commissioner for basic education, said that the existing law (which was resulting in more prosecutions of homeschoolers than any other state) was "fairly workable," and that he was not disturbed by differences in homeschooling policies among school districts.

A few months later, on August 24th, Federal Judge Edwin Kosik in Scranton ruled (Jeffery vs. O'Donnell) that the

existing law was unconstitutionally vague and struck it off the books if a new law is not passed, or new regulations promulgated by December 31st. (The Department of Education is now waiting in the wings with regulations which would begin new prosecutions of many successful families.)

Judge Kosik's ruling lit a fire under the homeschooling part of Rep. Cowell's House Bill 2501. On October 3rd, the evening before the homeschooling rally, Ron Cowell called together homeschooling leaders to meet with the Department of Education and negotiate about several additions to the bill that were being requested by the Department of Education.

Then on October 12th, the House Education Committee gutted Senate Bill 154 and replaced its original language

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"Pennsylvania Homeschoolers"
masthead lettered by
Jacob Richman, age 8.