

# Pennsylvania

# Homeschoolers

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A Statewide Network Sharing Information for Home Education • Editors: Susan & Howard Richman

Thank you: from the Richmans

Our heartfelt THANK YOU to all of you!!! We are all so grateful to everyone for their unstinting support during this very long legislative effort. Our family feels so blessed by the thoughtfulness and generosity of so many of you who wrote to thank us for our time and effort, and to make contributions to the at-times overwhelming legislative expenses. (Howard and I have joked that we knew our phone bills were getting high, when a \$200 a month WATTS line, allowing unlimited long distance calls, sounded CHEAP!) We really appreciate all the kind notes and letters, and wish we had the time to answer each one personally. We have never felt alone in this struggle-- your support and deep faith have kept all of us going. It has been a special joy to get to know so many fine families from all across the state. Again, our deepest thanks to all of you.

During this interim time while the new law is being implemented we want to keep close tabs on how things are going across the state. Are districts still acting as if their old policies are in effect? Are they putting in any "extra" conditions that are not contained in the actual law? Is testing going smoothly, with provision made for individual testing at the school site or testing by a private tester? Is anyone being called in for mid-year challenges? Are portfolios being evaluated fairly by superintendents? Are any due process hearings needed? We are certainly hoping for a speedy and smooth transition time, but want to know right away if any district is not recognizing the new law and its provisions. Keep in touch.

We of course have to be somewhat patient with districts right now, as they are just beginning to sift through the information coming to them from the Department of Education. Mr. Joseph Bard, the new Dept. of Ed. Home Education contact person (717-787-4860, Chief of Division of Advisory Services) has been VERY helpful and cooperative already, and shows a ready willingness to work WITH us in seeing that the law is faithfully implemented.

- Susan Richman

If you haven't already, now is the time to write thank you letters to your representative, senator and the governor.

masthead by Jacob Richman-8.

## Act 169 Passes

from Howard Richman

Our new law passed the House and Senate unanimously and was signed by the governor on December 21. It is now called Act 169. Look in this newsletter for the complete text. In a nutshell it requires you to file an affidavit every year and to keep a portfolio of your children's work which shows that you are giving your children an "appropriate education." You choose a teacher or psychologist to evaluate your portfolio and interview your child each year and then you turn in the portfolio and evaluation to the school superintendent.

On December 22, we sent out a mailing to all of our Pennsylvania subscribers including an affidavit that people could send in to register with the law right away. If you are a Pennsylvania subscriber and didn't get the packet, please let us know.

There is so much news that I cannot possibly fit it all in this newsletter, so I have written a book instead. The book will either be published by Wolgemuth & Hyatt in Tennessee or by us at *Pennsylvania Homeschoolers*. Raymond Moore has written a Forward for the book. We should be able to let you know in the next newsletter when it will be available. (If we publish it ourselves, it should be out before the next newsletter.)

The book is full of the events of the last five years where we made history. It tells of the initial beginnings, the exciting hearings where our children won the day. (Can we ever forget when Representative Battisto questioned Maggie Smeltzer?) It tells the behind the scenes story of the negotiating sessions, and of our tremendous eleventh hour lobbying effort where we beat the most powerful lobby in the state, the PSEA (the state-wide teacher's union), and had the capitol buzzing.

It recounts every word in the exciting drama when the House brought our bill up for a vote. What heroes we had in Rep. Joe Pitts and Rep. Ron Cowell!

Here's a little known incident, that tells just what we were up against:

A few hours after the bill passed the Senate, a school board member in York County was listening to a presentation sponsored by the Lincoln Intermediate Unit on how to prepare for the needs of their districts in the years ahead. The speakers at that meeting were Paul Stevens and another lawyer from the

Bucks County law firm, Curtin and Heefner.

The topic of the meeting got around to homeschooling. The lawyers said that the Homeschool Legal Defense Association had cut off the nose of homeschools to spite their face. Now that the present law had been declared to be unconstitutional, either the Department of Education would not enact regulations, in which case homeschooling would be completely illegal in Pennsylvania, or the Department of Education would enact regulations that would make homeschooling virtually impossible. They also claimed to have information that our homeschooling bill was definitely not going to pass. This just an hour after it had passed the Senate!

The fruits of our victory are not all in. When the Cottam case broke in the Wilkes Barre press, the representative from the Cottam's district first told the press that he would look into a change in the new homeschooling law so that there would be monthly home visits. When I called him on the phone, mentioning the leaders of the homeschooling support group in his district, he changed his tone, and said that he didn't think the law should be changed just because of one crazy person. None of the legislators want to tangle with us! I emphasized to him on the phone that the Cottams were the kind of family who probably would not have filed with the new homeschooling law, as they would refuse any supervision of what they were doing in their home, even from a friendly teacher or psychologist of their own choice.

The next six months will provide an excellent test of the new law. Many of the people who will now be registering are people in the extremely unfriendly districts, including people who have been prosecuted for teaching their own children. What will these least friendly superintendents do? We will be following the story in the next two issues of our newsletter. Personally, I expect that we will see a change in their attitudes. They will no longer see their role as preventing homeschooling, instead they will be conscious that parents have an appeal, and that they have to pay out of their own district's funds for an impartial hearing examiner if they force the parents to appeal. Anyone who knows school superintendents knows that they would not want to spend this money unless they thought that the homeschooled children were in danger.

We will see, the next six months will tell. ●