

# PA HOMESCHOOLERS

A Statewide Network for Sharing Information about Home Education, Editors Howard and Susan Richman  
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## Lessons of House Bill 2560

by Howard Richman

On November 13, 2002, a radical homeschool bill, HB 2560, failed to pass the House Education Committee after turning into a bill which would have made things worse for homeschoolers in PA. It all started so hopefully on February 14, 2000, when Rep. Armstrong and I organized the meeting which led to it. At that time I hoped that we could fix problems with the current law, but instead HB 2560 only led to division. We need to learn four lessons if we are to avoid the same mistakes in the future:

**1. You can't pass a bill that lacks accountability in Pennsylvania.** At the meetings where HB 2560 was hashed out, various professional lobbyists, including Ted Claytor of the Keystone Christian Education Association, explained that you can't pass a bill that lacks accountability in Pennsylvania. There are many types of accountability: (1) accountability to evaluators as we have in Pennsylvania today, (2) accountability to test scores, (3) accountability to a private or umbrella school, (4) accountability to a correspondence school, or (5) accountability to a church that supports and supervises homeschoolers. By trying to pass a bill without accountability the proponents of HB 2560 left a vacuum to be filled by the educational establishment with an accountability measure.

**2. Pennsylvania currently has one of the best bills in the country as far as accountability to an evaluator is concerned.** We have our choice of evaluators, even non-public school teachers who do not have teaching certificates – no other state has this choice. The evaluations go directly to the parent who turns them into the school district so that if one evaluator writes a bad evaluation you have the opportunity to go to a new evaluator. There are so many evaluators available that each parent can find an evaluator who shares his or her educational philosophy. For example, Christians can find an evaluator who shares their world view,

unschoolers can find an evaluator who shares their educational philosophy, academically-oriented homeschoolers can find an evaluator whose evaluation letters and recommendations help them gain college admissions and scholarships. This excellent evaluator law allows us to homeschool in safety and freedom.

**3. The "not one step backward" principle must be key to the lobbying effort.** In order for homeschoolers to work together to pass a homeschooling bill, there has to be a commitment that the group as a whole will oppose the entire bill if anything gets into it that would hurt any part of the homeschooling community. You don't erase the current law and try to rewrite it if you want to work together. There are only two possible ways to proceed if you follow this principle: (1) a careful incremental approach where you just try to make a few changes and oppose any bad changes in the current law, or (2) adding a new option which leaves the current law intact.

**4. Do not fall victim to your own propaganda.** In order to promote their diploma agenda, some groups involved in the lobbying effort for HB 2560 pretended that PHAA was a business, not an organization, and after a while they came to believe it. This could be the reason why they rejected the compromise, accepted by PHAA, that was negotiated on December 18 and included in the January 21 draft of HB 2560. This compromise would have continued the PA Department of Education's recognition of PHAA's homeschool association diploma and at the same time recognized correspondence school and parent-issued diplomas. Bill proponents took the compromise out of succeeding drafts, thinking that they could roll right over PHAA. They then tried to convince legislators that PHAA was a business. This didn't work because legislators were being contacted by constituents who were PHAA members.