

Educational Network of Christian Home-schoolers of New Jersey

ENOCH of NJ Legislative E-lert

Date: May 13, 2004

From: Mark August, Legislative Liaison, legislative_liason@enochnj.org

Re: New Jersey Assembly Bill 1918 (A1918) - **A CALL TO ACTION!**

A1918 is on the Agenda for the New Jersey Assembly Education Committee:

Monday, May 17, 2004 @ 2:00pm

Committee Room 16, 4th Floor, State House Annex, Trenton, NJ

HISTORY:

After a flurry of activity in January, Loretta Weinberg (D Bergen County) reintroduced her bill, now labeled A1918, which would require homeschoolers to submit to State oversight in the areas of standardized testing and medical examinations. The bill was referred to the Assembly Education Committee and several months passed with no activity. Many homeschoolers who were alarmed in January, returned to the routines of homeschooling life and the sense of peril faded. This past week, urgent calls and emails alerted New Jersey homeschoolers that the Assembly Education Committee had placed this bill on the agenda for a hearing – one that would occur in less than a week.

Information was received from the Chairman of the Education Committee that the sponsor had pulled the bill, asking for time purportedly to change some of the language. A modified agenda for the hearing indeed revealed that A1918 was not longer on the agenda. Last night it reappeared, this time on the agenda for Monday, May 17.

New Jersey homeschoolers have now received a wakeup call that this bill is still alive and well in the legislative system. The task force met by conference call this past Saturday and agreed on some actions to continue our offensive actions to this bill. Several of those actions involve a call to action to every homeschooler in New Jersey. Unless the homeschoolers in New Jersey can convince the men and women in Trenton that we can be a significant political force, there is a realistic possibility that this bill – or some amended version of it will become law. Stated more positively, there is also a realistic possibility that if the New Jersey homeschoolers can come together and make themselves noticed – that this bill will be defeated. The task force is assembling witnesses who can convincingly argue why this bill or any similar one should be defeated. This testimony however must be perceived as representing a large number of

constituents of the legislators. We must make them aware of our numbers – and that the testimony they will be hearing represents the passionate beliefs of a large number of voters. It would help our cause tremendously if we become perceived as a sleeping giant, one that has not been seen in the recent past because it was not threatened. One of the things we need to communicate is that now that we have been threatened, we are wide-awake and willing and able to take action to protect our rights.

THE CALL TO ACTION:

This call to arms means that if you are reading this, you need to see yourself as a soldier in the battle. This battle will not be won by a mercenary army we pay to fight our battle, but by a militia of the rank and file homeschooling families. Some will be asked to testify and argue our position, but the vast majority will be called upon to visibly support those making the arguments. Over the next weeks and months, you will be asked to temporarily put aside your schedule and possibly your preferences – and sacrifice your time and maybe even some important activities to join in the battle.

The first such call comes right now:

The task force is asking that every homeschooling family in New Jersey to call their legislator's offices, unless that legislator has already committed to support our position. A list of those already on our side can be found at the end of this alert. There is information on ENOCH's website about how to determine who your legislators are, as well as supporting information to our opposition. You will want to state your opposition to this bill – and if you are comfortable dialoging, help them understand your opposition. Please read through the materials on the ENOCH website – and then make an appeal in your own words asking your legislator to oppose this bill. If this is a bit overwhelming to you, you can choose from one of the statements provided by HSLDA in their recent E-lert copied below. Take care to let them know that you are a voting constituent in their district and that you are depending on them to represent you in this issue. If you share the same political party as your legislator, then let them know that. If you can determine how your Assemblyman will vote on A1918, let me know ASAP.

Please come and support those testifying on Monday. We will be sending a separate E-lert with details regarding Monday's hearing will be distributed tomorrow afternoon. Some task force members are contacting the Committee chairman to find out how much room we will have, how much testimony will be allowed, etc. We also hope to have some information about any changed wording in the bill, although this may not be available until the hearing.

If you have not already done so, please make this issue one that you and your family spend some time praying about. I would recommend that if possible before Monday, you organize with at least one other homeschooling family and pray together about this bill, the men and women who will be testifying, the men and women who will be voting, and what role God is calling your and your family to take. You can go to the State website, link to the Education Committee – and click on each members webpage. Print these out and pray specifically for those members over the next few days.

We are also planning a Rally in Trenton sometime soon after the hearing. This sort of activity requires scheduling and permits. We are in the process of pursuing such a permit at this time. We will be notifying you about this event in a future E-let.

MOTIVATION:

If you are like most homeschooling families, making a trip to Trenton on short notice will be challenging. It will involve inconvenience and expenses. I suggest to you that the benefits of every homeschooling family in New Jersey making their physical presence known in Trenton will pay huge dividends beyond the short-term cost. The media will surely take some notice – and this in itself will help keep any decisions about this bill in the public eye and not in closed door meetings of politicians. It will also graphically demonstrate to the politicians in New Jersey that we are serious – and a force to be reckoned with. The alternative cost may be in the time and expenses you will incur in yearly medical exams, modifying your curriculum or teaching methods to satisfy the standardized testing requirements of the State Board of Education. If you have to pay this cost, it will be for many years and even possibly for the entire remaining homeschooling years left to your family.

There are probably a few reasons why you should see your family as exempt from this call to action. Scheduled or emergency surgery might qualify, as would a death in the family or the beginnings of labor. The vast majority, however, are not exempt. If the call comes on the day of your coop or outside classes – those should be cancelled for the day. Anyone organizing classes for homeschoolers that day has a responsibility to free up those enrolled to allow them to answer the call. If a sports commitment might interfere, it should be skipped. If you are a few days (or weeks) behind in your school schedule – then you should become one more day behind. If you have small children, great – politicians love photo ops with small children; be there. If you did not get enough sleep the night before, imagine the sleepless nights you will have if this bill becomes law. If you have a general rule that you leave work like this to others, then shame on you. If the common citizen of the colonies that became the United States did not heed the call to arms of the founding fathers in the colonial militias, we would most likely be appealing to the King instead of our chosen representatives.

Again, on a more positive note, how would you like to hear your children recall the story of how they were a part of history in New Jersey? They will teach their children, as part of New Jersey history, how their grandparents joined thousands of others in 2004 and made their voices heard in the halls of the State House and the streets of Trenton – and were a part of securing the rights they now enjoy as homeschoolers in 2025. They will pull out a faded photograph and point to Grandma and Grandpa standing on the steps of the State House with their children around them – and say, “how blessed we were to be Americans, to have the opportunity to have our voices heard, and to have parents with the strength and courage to raise them.”

ENOCH Web Site related to

A1918: <http://enochnj.org/pagegen.cgi?opcode=detail&file=A1918.txt>

LEGISLATORS ALREADY COMMITTED TO OUR POSITION: (The Do Not Call List)

Dist. 1: Gibson
Dist. 2: Blee, Conover
Dist. 10: Wolfe
Dist. 14: Baroni
Dist. 16: Biondi
Dist. 23: Doherty
Dist. 24: Gregg, McHose
Dist. 25: Carroll, Merkt
Dist. 26: DeCroce, Pennacchio
Dist. 30: Dancer, Malone
Dist. 39: Vandervalk
Dist. 40: O'Toole

We will try and keep this list posted and up-to-date on the ENOCH website.

HSLDA PROVIDED REASONS TO OPPOSE A1918:

1. Federal law prohibits states from requiring that homeschoolers take a state assessment designed for public school students. New Jersey would lose millions of dollars of federal funds if this bill is enacted, since it violates this requirement.
2. State assessments test material taught in the public school curriculum. Homeschool children do not use the public school curriculum. It would be unfair to test them on material they do not study.
3. Statistics show that higher regulation--such as mandatory testing- -does not help homeschool students. Studies show that homeschoolers score 20 to 30 percentile points higher than others students. Forcing them to take tests when their performance has already been proven is senseless.
4. It would give the Board of Education power to define--and thus entirely control--homeschooling. Parents could be transformed overnight into criminal suspects by Board regulations that define "homeschooling" in a way that prohibits them from doing what have been doing successfully for years.
5. Forcing families to prove their children have received a medical examination is an invitation for the state to interfere in family medical issues.
6. Neither public nor private school students are required to receive annual medical examinations.
7. No other state requires an annual medical examination for homeschoolers.

8. This bill is a knee-jerk reaction to the highly publicized case in Collingswood where the Jackson family allegedly starved their children. If true, the blame lies with DYFS. They were in the family's home over 30 times and never noticed a nutrition problem. DYFS should be punished, not homeschoolers. There is absolutely no evidence that homeschool parents are more likely to neglect their children than anyone else.