

Written Testimony on
H.R. 2343
“The Education Begins at Home Act”

by
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Good morning, Chairman Miller, Ranking Member McKeon, and honorable members of the committee. My name is William A. Estrada, and I am an attorney and the director of federal relations for the Home School Legal Defense Association. Thank you for the opportunity to testify regarding H.R. 2343, the Education Begins at Home Act.

Since 1983, HSLDA has represented the interests of our homeschooling member families in all 50 states. We currently have a membership of over 80,000 families. We have serious concerns with H.R. 2343.

My testimony today will focus on section 9 of the bill. We believe that the provisions in section 9 will harm family integrity and parental rights.

Section 9, “Supporting New Parents Through Hospital Education,” requires the Secretary of Health and Human Services to create a public awareness campaign to inform the public and new parents about the importance of proper care for infants and children under 5 years of age. The Secretary will ensure that every hospital, military hospital, and birthing center request that families coming through its doors participate in a parenting class that is approved by the Secretary. The hospital must then request that the family sign a form indicating whether or not they chose to take this class.

Section 9 is not clear if hospitals, military hospitals, and birthing centers may refuse to offer these materials and parenting classes. Because of this vagueness, there is no assurance that religious hospitals or birthing centers could reject materials or parenting classes that violated their fundamental values.

Section 9 is also not clear about who will design these parenting classes. There is no guidance offered to HHS, so the Secretary may decide to only approve classes that are designed by “experts” without any involvement from actual parents. We don’t need a “big mother” supervising parenting. Parents have numerous parenting philosophies that

may differ from a one-size-fits-all government parenting class. This could lead to limits on parental choice and parental rights, because parents will feel pressured to take these classes and conform to whatever parenting philosophy is taught.

Furthermore, the provision that the classes teach "...strategies for caring for infants' social, emotional, and physical needs" is vague enough to include many conformist philosophies that would concern many families, particularly homeschooling families. For example, despite plentiful research to the contrary, there are experts who do not believe that homeschooling is good for children's social, emotional, and physical needs. One need only look at the recent California Court of Appeal decision, *In re Rachel L.*, where the Court made a blanket ruling that California parents do not have the right to homeschool their children unless they are certified teachers. This would have the effect of needlessly discouraging many families from homeschooling.

Although the parenting classes are optional, Section 9 would likely lead to needless social worker referrals. Since the hospitals and birthing centers must request a signature showing that families participated in or refused the class, a referral could be given to the child welfare department alleging neglect because the family refused these parenting classes. In reality, the family may have chosen to decline participation because of disagreements with the classes' parenting philosophy.

To avoid these and other problems that infringe on parental rights, we ask that section 9 be removed from this bill.

Thank you very much and I yield back the balance of my time.