

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Opinion: Senators Should Support Home-Schooling In U.S. Virgin Islands

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The freedom U.S. Virgin Islands home-schoolers have enjoyed for many years will be crushed if the pending homeschool regulations from the U.S. Virgin Islands Board of Education (VIBOE) are put into force.

The solution is Bill Number 31-0391. It moves the power to regulate homeschooling from the VIBOE to the legislature, and preserves all the current homeschool freedoms. The pending draconian regulations from the VIBOE would be superseded by Bill Number 31-0391.

As a quick background to why we are at this point today as home-schoolers, it helps to understand the history of the issue. The VIBOE has felt a need to regulate homeschooling due to alternative educational entities that appeared on St Croix in 2014, calling themselves "Learning Centers" (LC).

These LC's started as an option for parents who were seeking to remove their child from the public school system. A parent will send their child to the LC for a full day, for a fee. The LC is in a large room of a home, run by a person who oversees the child's on-line school work. One LC on St Croix has over 60 children. These LC's housing large numbers of students with no parental presence, called themselves homeschools.

When certain parents were disappointed in the results of these new LC's, they called the VI Board of Education to complain. This resulted in the decision by the VIBOE to erroneously begin scrutinizing and regulating homeschooling as a whole.

In 2014 they wrote a controversial set of proposed homeschool regulations. Despite the overwhelming opposition of homeschool families in April 2016 the Board of Education signed their controversial set of homeschool regulations. If these regulations were to go into effect, they would destroy many freedoms families have enjoyed for years and dramatically increase the burden of wasteful red tape.

In response to this threat, the U.S. Virgin Islands Homeschoolers (USVIH) drafted a bill that would safeguard current freedoms and put the U.S. Virgin Island Legislature in charge of homeschool policy. Forty-three of the fifty US state legislatures regulate homeschooling directly without delegating that responsibility to a regulatory board. The trend is to move regulatory authority from boards to the legislature. The state of Maine abolished the power of their state board to regulate homeschooling in 2006. The Alabama legislature abolished the power of their state board to regulate homeschooling in 2014.

At the request of USVIH, Senator Novelle E. Francis, Jr., filed the bill and it is now set for a legislative hearing on Monday October 3rd on St Croix. The hearing will be a crucial test for the bill.

If bill #31-0391 is approved by the legislative committee and subsequently enacted, the VIBOE will no longer have authority over homeschooling. The power to regulate homeschooling will belong exclusively to the legislature, where it belongs and current freedoms will be secure. It is critical that homeschoolers unite, stand up and speak out.

You can help tremendously by contacting your senators on the Education and Work Force committee who will be reviewing the bill at a hearing with the stakeholders on Monday 10/3/16 on St Croix. Ask them to support Bill #31-0391!

Education and Work Force Committee Member contact information:

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Homeschool Facts: Homeschooling in the USVI is mainstream, and has been for many years. Hundreds of families on all four US Virgin Islands have chosen to school their children at home. A parent's choice to homeschool is a freedom we as American's enjoy as a fundamental right. Homeschooling is growing exponentially in all 50 States and its possessions. There are more than 3 million homeschooled children in the United States. It is a known fact through much national research that Homeschooled children excel and are sought after by some of the top colleges and Universities in the country.

Homeschooling methods are diverse, with hundreds of curriculum choices available to homeschool families. Homeschool parents enjoy the freedom to teach to their child's learning style, with freedom of choice as to what subjects, as well as when and how these subjects are taught. Homeschool focuses on developing the whole child: physical, emotional, social and cognitive in a supportive, thoughtfully prepared home learning environment.

We ask the USVI Homeschool Community as well as the US Virgin Island community as a whole to stand with us in support of homeschool freedom.

Submitted on Wednesday by: Andrea King, USVIH Administrator Scott Woodruff and Senior Council Homeschool Legal Defense Association.