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— *Jessica Dugas, The Breakthrough Show Network*

📁 6-24-25 Meeting Audio.mp3

Conference Room Coverage Begins:

Representative Biggins:

the goal is that in this I know that this is a complex issue and we can disagree on what the issue is or if there's an issue at all, but we don't have to be disagreeable and we can have a conversation and I think that and the people that I've had conversations with in this room know that I am open to having a conversation even though we're coming at it from a different angle. We may not get to a point where we agree on something but we can get a better understanding of where the other person is coming from and where each other are coming from.

And how do we figure out if there's a problem, what the problem might be, and how do we address that problem? Is that the goal of the group?

And so we're respectful of each other while we're here and respectful of the process in order to get that job done. I think that's the only ground rule of this group. And when I say the process, I want to clarify that, because that doesn't really make sense unless I clarify it, so I realized that after I wrote the agenda.

But today is to talk about what questions we might have and for who, and hopefully get those in by next week, and then kind of organize them based on agency. And then after that, our follow-up meeting to this meeting will probably be to ask those questions of those state agencies. So what I'll do with the questions that you guys send to me is send those to the state agency, ask them to come in prepared to answer those questions, not exclusively those questions, but those questions and then any then follow-up questions that might be along the lines of those questions. Because I feel like after May 5th, one of the things that I saw was that Diane and Deborah had questions, but just like me and the other people that were there, we had two questions we had the ability to ask of the state agencies for you guys, but you guys didn't have the ability to ask any questions of the state agencies, which didn't seem like open communication to me. So I would like to make sure we have that open communication, we have the ability to ask those questions of those state agencies, ask them, well, whatever questions you guys have. And based on their answers to those questions, we might be able to identify a problem. And that's after we meet with, I'm assuming, the State Department of Ed, Department of Children and Families, and the Office of the Child Advocate. Those are the ones I'm assuming. There might be other state agencies that I have not accounted for yet. But based on the questions we have for those ones and maybe others, I'm assuming we'll have them come in one at a time and ask our questions of them. And then we'll have another meeting to go over that after that. And then what we determine as the concerns that came out of those questions and come out of that process is what we'll try to see what we want to do, if we draft legislation or something else along

those lines, or come up with a problem we're trying to solve based on those questions. So that's really it. And if you have questions, I'll write them down right now, but if not, just email me your questions.

Attendee:

I just have two, I guess, questions for what you said. So thank you. I appreciate your being open, I really do. So when you contact the agencies and they come, will it be a forum, will it be a public hearing, what will that look like?

Representative Biggins:

So the idea of this room was that this would be the room we would use. And that this, in theory, would be the space we would bring the state agency into. They're not going to make a presentation. They would come in and maybe answer the questions that we present to them. But the goal of this group is that we're a working group, we're able to get to know each other, we're able to ask questions of each other, disagree, and have that conversation. And I think that that's really the goal to be here, is to engage in that work of we disagree on this topic, let's talk about it, let's talk about why we disagree on it, let's talk about how we get to a common understanding. So this is the space we're going to use. I don't think we're going to be able to have this many people in the room in the future in order to have those conversations. I think that the public part of this process is going to be in the spring if anything comes out of the work. Then that would go to public hearings.

Attendee:

So that was kind of my second question. Can you talk about the goal a little bit?

So I guess my question would be, is the goal to come up with legislation or really just talk through thoughts, concerns, and maybe we don't come up with legislation?

Again, I think that I don't want to influence the fact that we told the legislation. I would like to say I want to create the space to ask the questions. If there are concerns that come out of those questions and we

address those concerns, that would be the legislation part. But I think first we ask the questions, we have the conversations, and then we see if there's concerns, then maybe we address those concerns, and that's where we get informed. There might not be, but we want to...

Attendee:

I guess I'll ask just so that I have my notes good here. You say this is a working group but for the purpose of what? I mean when you say ask questions that doesn't help like what are we really doing here are we looking to find something to address or are we saying things are fine or there's somewhere in between but what are what are we what's like the end goal here like what are we I mean I appreciate that you're saying we just want to ask questions but like that's a big that's a big ask.

You did say the ladies on the 5th couldn't get questions answered. So is it just to bring the state agencies together to get clarity? Or I guess I'm a little confused.

Representative Biggins:

So after the May 5th meeting, I felt like there was questions I still had. One of the concerns I had after the May 5th meeting was when the Office of the Child Advocate presented data that was, I've heard from people that they don't agree with the data, but the data that they presented was concerning to me. So they presented something along the lines of seven percent of families that remove their children from public school to homeschooling have four or more DCF reports. And I believe that that's the statistic that was presented to us. That, to me, is concerning.

So, again, I don't want to, I'm remembering it, from I don't know how long ago. It was a while ago. And a lot of stuff has happened since then. But that's the information that was presented to us. So that's a concern in my brain that I want to ask the child advocate for more data on and more information about. And I know that the other concern was that people didn't have the ability to ask follow-up questions. So I don't want to necessarily say that's the concern we're going to address. I want to say that we have

the ability to ask questions. And if that's still a concern, then we can get to that. But I don't want to influence what we move towards by typing so that's there.

Attendee:

And prior to May 5th, what was going on that created the May 5th, so I'm trying to get back to the very beginning to say what brought, why did May 5th happen?

Other Representative:

I have a comment on that. So, I was with Representative Leeper, she's the chair of Education and we were talking about education legislation and how it would come out during session and so she brought forth to me that uh we were gonna have this homeschooling forum that I'm sure everybody in this room was there, we're not going to reiterate that, but um that that happened. So I had asked in that meeting if the intent was to create legislation. And so I'm not sure about that. So then I heard that you were putting this together. So that's kind of where I was coming from. But that's kind of the steps that I initially was in on. And that's when I reached out to Ann, being children's. So that's how that forum kind of came about or how I found out that it was coming about.

So something happened with the Waterbury. Well, so everybody's familiar with Waterbury. What happened? I represent part of Waterbury, not that specific location, but I do represent Waterbury. I was very involved with all of that, had conversations about DCF, to your point, representatively is earlier point. So had many conversations with DCF about that.

And that was prior to talking to Leeper? about...

That happened prior to... And there was, when I was ranking on Children's Committee a few years back, Senator McCrory was the chair of Children's Committee. There was a case Matthew Tirado happened. So I lived that case through being making the conference as Senator McCrory did. And the point was, and we all know that that was never going to be

homeschooling, and we're not here to talk about that today, but that was the excuse to pull one of the children out. So I'm familiar with both of those.

Attendee:

So it did stem back to those cases and those situations as to why part of that issue is the homeschooling? And that's why?

Representative Biggins:

Can I clarify something? I think that people using homeschooling, no one saying that that is homeschooling, it's that people are using homeschooling, I believe that people are the lack of regulation in our state to claim homeschooling when that's not the case. I just wanna make sure. Is that?

Attendee:

You're saying that's true?

Representative Biggins:

No, no, I don't know a hundred percent, but I don't, from the homeschooling families I know, the homeschooling families that I've interacted with since the process began, I do not believe that that is an accurate representation of the homeschooling community. I think if that is someone using our lack of regulations, to say, well, I'm homeschooling and remove their child from school, and then there being no .

<chatter>

That's a great question.

Can I ask a question?

Yeah, please.

Deborah Stevenson:

Because I'd like to have the facts straightened out, OK? So everybody can understand. One thing, that representative... You had mentioned that you had been talking with DCF or involved with the DCF in the Waterbury case

and that you lived through the Tirado case. Were you aware, I'm sure you were aware, in neither of those cases, involved a student who was homeschooled or married to homeschool. Yes. So we're talking about a situation where those two situations, those children were enrolled in the public school and prevented from going to attend that public school, correct?

Yes.

So my question is, why then did the subject of homeschooling come up at all?

That's the question I was going to ask is why.

Attendee:

My point that's where I was headed. There was no there was no factual data that showed that they were ever pulled out or intended to be homeschooled and it seemed as though that this rumor got started and from all accounts and everything I've looked at there is no data that shows that either child was homeschooled so we're still trying to figure out why they did so that's back to you I'm sorry I'm still trying to figure out why.

Representative Biggins:

I don't have an answer on the origins of May 5th. I was a member of May 5th, and I participated. I asked my two questions. I got my two questions. They weren't great questions, but I asked them. But I think that I felt after that meeting that there was a conversation that was not complete. And that's where I felt like it was... In an incomplete conversation, it doesn't feel like the conversation's not done and people have questions and they don't have an opportunity to ask those questions that seems not fair. I don't want that ending of it. I believe in fairness and people have the ability to get their questions answered.

Attendee:

Well I'm I will say, forgive me, I will say then that there's no connection here okay there's a problem there certainly is a problem especially these two cases and honestly I think what we need to do is clear the room and get DCF in here and talk to DCF about...

<APPLAUSE>

Attendee:

My point being is that, yeah, there is a problem. And we all, everybody in this room, homeschoolers or not, or legislators or not, we all feel for these two cases and what happened. And I have a whole lot more questions about for DCF, then I have to, any of the people in the room, including yourself. And I mean that in all respect. I would like to get to the bottom of the fact that our government did poorly on these children who were in DCF's care, period. That's the bottom line. It has nothing to do with what, All these people are here to tell us that it has nothing to do with it. It really doesn't. If we want to talk about homeschooling on another day and another meeting, fine. It has nothing to do with homeschooling. It has to do with the state agency who is looking after the welfare of children who have been in their care for whatever reason and have nothing to do with any of us. They're in their care because unfortunate bad things happen in certain families and certain circumstances and has nothing to do with teachers and schools and crayons and nothing. It has to do with their living situation. It doesn't have to do with their school. We need to get DCF at the table and say what happened? We don't want this to happen. And can the school help? You know, can the clergy help? Can their doctors help? They're all mandated reporters, not just school people, right? So we need to get DCF at the table first. And I, in all due respect, I think we get, again, I love y'all. But get DCF up in the room. And then you guys want to come in and ask questions, fine. But it doesn't even have to do with you guys asking questions. It has to do with us and putting our own government here for the welfare of children. You guys aren't children. The welfare of the children in here. And find out from them what happened.

Deborah Stevenson:

Well, I would like to address that. I would like to know, too. I have been trying to find out what happened for years. For Matthew Tirado. I filed a FOIA request for that information about what happened, what's going on. This is nothing about homeschooling, but a child died on their watch.

Attendee:

And also, there's HIPPA laws. This isn't a public thing. Yes, I understand that, but we have to understand this is very sensitive.

Deborah Stevenson:

But there are exceptions to the confidentiality rules, and that's in our statutes, okay? And they did not respond with one iota, DCF, okay? And it brings me to you, Representative Zupkus, because You indicated that you were talking with DCF about the Waterbury case, and I commend you for that, and trying to get information. However, we've heard after May 5th, and at May 5th, that DCF says, well, we can't tell anybody anything. So, which I know is incorrect, because the statutes say you can share with different agencies, especially the legislature and the governor, they can do that. But this is what is being put out, and I really would like everyone to go on the actual facts and the law. And so I'm wondering, did DCF share that information with you without any statement like they did today in terms of we can't tell you.

Representative:

So I talked to them. There were certain things they could not tell me because it was an active investigation. And I appreciate that. But the Waterbury delegation met with DCF, the commissioner, and told us at that point what they could tell us. It was not everything because that was before the police report came out. And then they found the files on a flash drive, whatever that drive was. Well, flash drives are not good for flash drives. Whatever. So that came out. I do not have every detail and nor did they share every detail. I'm just saying that the Waterbury delegation wanted to have a meeting obviously with DCF to see what fell through, where, and all of those things and so I agree with Representative Haynes that I think we should have a meeting with DCF and SDE because I have found out some

things that they sometimes talk to each other and sometimes they don't and why. I have been explained why they don't at times. So I think, you know, again, I agree, everybody's great, but I think there's some stuff that needs to be done first before we even go down a homeschool road. They go down the homeschool road because the people that pulled their kids out said they were going to homeschool and we never knew. We always knew they were not homeschooled.

Deborah Stevenson:

Was Representative Leeper involved in that then?

Representative:

No, she was not. That was Waterbury delegation.

So how does the... could you... Representative Leeper (inaudible).

Representative:

That was after. Before the form. So I was with her as a ranking member and we do screenings. And so it was basically a screening and was told that we're going to have this forum on homeschooling. And we all know after that, I'm not going to reiterate all that thing, but we all know what happened after.

It's just the context... (inaudible)

Well, I mean, listen, we all know, just for..., the state has been wanting to regulate homeschooling for a very long time. Let's just put the facts out there, right? We all know that. That's nothing to be hidden from. And so any reason that something happens where somebody says homeschooling, it is... a trigger, but a trigger to try to see what can be done. Right. That's just the facts. So, but, but, but I do want to give you, thank you. I think that, I think we should sit down and talk because there's two separate things here. I don't think homeschooling is part of this. I think like Irene said, we need to figure out as the legislature why did one child die and then why did

Waterbury happen? Right? And that has nothing to do with homeschooling. Not one has anything to do with the other.

Attendee:

So I think part of this is, I'm curious what training DCF gets around homeschooling and what the laws are. (inaudible) That's a question I have because there's a lot of fear, I think, around DCF investigations. And some of it is found when that isn't currently the law. And then they get investigated by DCF... They're not doing anything wrong. They're following the rules. They're following the rules. I'm concerned about if DCF regulation or not, if they don't have clear instructions what is, what those are. An individual DCF worker might have biases, might treat people differently based on things like race and class. And I'm concerned about that. So I think that it would be interesting to know what DCF tells its workers, if anything, about homeschooling as it is right now, because I don't know if it's consistent across the board. So that's something that I would be curious to hear.

Attendee:

And is homeschool an automatic DCF referral? It should not be.

Attendee:

But there are certain school systems that that also are not educated. We need to educate superintendents and staff at central offices to understand what the laws are around homeschooling, because that's one of the things that comes up. So if you don't do what they say they want you to do, they will make referrals. The districts the superintendent's office usually will send letters um saying threatening if you don't comply with what we're telling you to do then we will... right okay

Diane Connors:

I want to say that over the years decades I've talked to many families that will call and we have a private conversation about the fact that they have been referred to DCF because they're homeschooling. These are families that they were not substantiated. There was nothing wrong. But this is

important to your point. I worked with a mom that the DCF worker commented on all the goddess figurines that were on her fireplace mantle. That is completely inappropriate. And other examples along that line um one of them had different bibles on her coffee table and the worker called that out that should never come into the discussion but it does and I'm going to say something else and I'm going to tell you... pardon me...

<chatter>

I mean, I have one in my house...

Diane Connors:

Maybe her husband was a minister. I do not know. But these are the things that have happened. And I could go on for hours about these types of calls and the different situations.

Attendee:

But that skews the data. That skews the data. If a school district refuses to understand what the laws are and says, oh, because you won't file this form that you're not required to file by law, we're going to refer you to DCF, now you've got people in your data that were referred to DCF for absolutely, positively, no reason other than being harassed by their district.

Attendee:

And I take these phone calls regularly. We don't have to report that we homeschool. We're homeschooling. And that seven percent, that's coming from people who have been reported and they're found out to be homeschooled. And then you have people who willingly file with their districts who say we're homeschooling. And so that seven percent is way larger than what is in reality. (Some inaudible) Because there's a lot of us who don't report. No, no, no. That seven percent is larger than reality. Yeah. No, I think it's less. I think it's less because the law is you do not have to file that you are homeschooling. If you pull out, yes. If you start homeschooling from kindergarten and keep going, you do not have to file. There is a large population of homeschoolers who have never filed because they never

pulled out. You only have to file if you pull out. That 7% is probably a gross overestimation.

Attendee:

Does she have a law answer to that?

Deborah Stevenson:

Yes. The problem why there is, and I agree with the two of you about that, and I've heard these stories for years. I have defended these people against this kind of false accusation. But the problem is really not just with the social workers. It goes up the chain. And the main problem is the lawyers in the department, in both education and DCF. And I'll tell you why. This is really annoying to me because it's in black and white in the law. And on May 5th, the lawyers for those agencies sat there and they totally ignored the most important part of the law that says we have the duty to instruct our own children. Why did they do that? That is not just an accident for all of them to just start in the middle of the statute. So this is a real problem and been a problem for decades. It's through in the legal department, the Department of Education, DCF, and probably OCA. I don't know, that's a smaller agency. But this is what we have had to battle for years. And we have been coerced into filing these pieces of paper that are not required by law. And there's a statute about that, too. It is called the coercion statute. That's a criminal statute. But yet these superintendents and principals do this all the time.

Attendee:

So, I have a question. I don't know where it goes, but I'll ask it. Ask the group, let's say. Who does the referrals? Where do the referrals come from? Do they come from the school? How does DCF find whoever they have a problem with? Where do they come from?

Diane Connors:

In most schools the standard procedure is the school social worker makes the actual phone call...

Attendee:
To DCF?

Diane Connors:

To DCF um or to fill out the 136 form or the intake worker will do it um and I want to make two points about that a little bit of a segue about this overall prejudice that we've experienced for decades because I know, and this has been published in the Connecticut media as well in various articles, that if a homeschooler doesn't file a notice of intent, they have not broken a law. But they get reported anyway, and DCF's on it like that. But you have school teachers that call the hotline or the care line, and they say, oh, such and such is going on in a major city. And I know people that have experienced this. And the response is, well, what do you expect? It's, insert the city. And they do not accept the call. But if a homeschooler does not file a notice of intent, I addressed this with (inaudible one time. And she did respond in writing. And she said, that is correct. A homeschooler does not have to file a notice of intent. That is not a reason for initiating an investigation. But it happens. And I said to her, then you need to do something about the people in your field offices because these workers are going in. They're following supervisors orders. They're handed the information from their supervisors and they're following through. And then you get some of them that go in there and they don't know the law. They don't even know the policies. And they're telling these families, you have to file it. And they're like, no, we don't. No, we don't. Yes, you do. And there are even... For my own safety, I'm concerned to say what I'm going to say, but I'm saying it. I know of families, and this is documented on Facebook in multiple groups with attorneys in the group, parents in the group, of this is above and beyond homeschoolers, but it does not exclude them. It's happened in the community. People that have been referred, these are not people that have done anything wrong. And then DCF shows up in the middle of the night with the police and they, well, do you have a warrant? No. Okay, there's no warrant. Well, go get a warrant. No, you let us in or you'll never see your kids again. That's been documented, so.

Deborah Stevenson:

Yes, and in addition to that, I mean, DCF, I've dealt with them for years, and this does happen, but it's mainly the lawyers who are, they don't know the law, or they know the law and intentionally are doing it. I don't know. But they are giving this information down the chain. And no matter how many times I have been in the courtroom, I have been defending these people, this has happened. And I'm sorry, but there are laws against filing a false complaint. 17a-101, for example, okay, and no one ever gets held accountable for that in these agencies. These agencies are, you know, they can use a term, but to us, it appears like they're running amok and doing what they feel like. Because you put it in their face, and they go, oh, well, we have to talk with our education person or our advisor, and they come back and there's no change, and they still proceed to prosecute you. So that's a false, I tell many of them, go to court. And I've gotten them dismissed only after, you know, a lot of, I mean, all the expense and the emotional trauma that they put these parents through by not following their own law. And I would say there were DCF reports that were made in Waterbury for five full years by the school system. That kid was in the school for five full years and DCF and the police did nothing. They went in the house twice and believed the perpetrator. They thought everything was okay and then they walked away. That to me is absolutely wrong. It's right on the agencies. It happened with Torrato in a 96 second hearing that they dismissed the case and two weeks later that that child was dead and five years and this this other child has to go twenty more years locked in a room because these agencies didn't do their jobs and didn't know the law okay. This is the problem. The legislature needs to look back and investigate.

<inaudible>

Representative Biggins: Casey yeah. And then after Casey I do have I want to respect everyone's time. So after Casey goes I'm going to ask one more question just of the group about and then I want us to respect your time and make sure we get out of here so Casey go ahead.

Casey (Homeschool Parent):

So I know people who <much of this inaudible> see our issue... SO I was looking on the CRHE website to see... And they said that they found that homeschool oversight policies are rarely effective at identifying abuse that's taking place, much less at stopping it, which surprised me, because they want regulations, but it's not, they're saying they found regulations, they found abuse in 47 states under DCF. It didn't matter if they were regulations or not. And I'm someone who's been trying to think really hard and talk to friends about what regulations might stop abuse, and still protect the rights of homeschoolers and account for a lot of things. But if CRHE is saying, there's nothing that's helping, I don't know if that kind of looked like, that surprised me. Honestly, they said that their red flag was that people withdraw to homeschool under suspicious circumstances. But as you said, people aren't necessarily even withdrawn. They just stop sending their kids. So I feel like we need to have some sort of thing where DCF, if the kid stops being truant and just isn't going, DCF has to be going up those kids. Even if it's a withdrawal to homeschool with four or more verified cases, I feel like that's a conversation. Maybe if someone has four or more verified cases, maybe that's high enough that they could be followed up for a few years. I don't know.

Attendee:

Maybe that's one thing we need to do, is we need to look at truancy numbers versus withdrawal of children. And if there's correlations there versus withdrawal and homeschooling. And homeschooling, again, I keep saying, homeschooling is so separate. We're talking about disconnected youth, right? Disconnected youth, truancy, all of those things. Those are the things we need to look at. Look at these guys.

Deborah Stevenson: The State Department of Education said that 87 thousand <inaudible> children right now in this state are currently truant. And what is the agency doing about it?

Diane Connors: That number actually peaked February of 2025. This is in one of the Connecticut news articles. That number peaked to 98,000 an all time high.

<Random Comments/Discussion, Some Inaudible>

Are there any insurance parents here? I was a truant. My, my, my thirteen year old was a truant as well. As a student, I was a truant. She had the flu, and then COVID, and then she got the flu again. So we're all the same age. Truancy is when you get eighteen or more absences in school year. She got, I think she had eighteen. My daughter's truant. No. There's a lot of it.

Representative Biggins:

So just to be in respect of everyone's time, are there days of the week that are better for people? Are there days of the week that are no good for people? I would like to continue this conversation, but I don't want to do it...<inaudible> So what was the question?

Attendee:

You said you want to continue this conversation?

Attendee:

I think we're going to continue with the next step of...<inaudible chatter>

Representative Biggins:

Well, I think that the questions I have so far, if I was to read off the questions. One question was, do DCF cases stop when students are removed from schools for homeschooling? That was a question for DCF.

<Chatter, Some inaudible>

Yeah, so if they continue, DCF continues until they feel like it's closed. They don't have a limit.

Representative Biggins:000000

We should ask DCF. I agree with you. That's my understanding of DCF, but I just would like to ask DCF the question. I think it's a fair question to be asked. We want to have DCF come in first, which is fair, too.

What training does DCF receive around homeschooling? What does SDE do to train boards on homeschooling? OCA to come in and talk about whatever data they had and where they go their data. How does DCF get referrals? I think that was not like homeschooling.

Attendee:

I think what you were asking on that was, are how many of, if we're gonna move the conversation away towards the state agencies, <inaudible> is how many of the homeschoolers, representatives, are supposed to be continuing, are we gonna continue future meetings, or is it gonna move?

Representative Biggins:

Would you like answers to the questions?

Attendee:

Okay, I understand what you mean. I mean, we have these questions. But our question is, could this just lead to just legislation for DCF?

Representative Biggins:

It could.

Attendee:

And stay away from homeschoolers?

<Inaudible chatter>

Representative Biggins:

Again, I don't want to influence where the legislation goes. I just would like to, there was a conversation that got started that didn't get answered.

Attendee:

Well, I don't mind continuing this conversation.

Attendee:

Exactly. I don't want to.

Representative Biggins:

It might only be for SDE. It might only be for DCF. I don't want to say where the legislation is going to go. I think that's unfair to the people, everyone.

Attendee:

One thing I would say is there might be space for conversation because it was said that there is a push to regulate homeschooling that that there's always there's always a question...

<Inaudible Chatter>

Attendee:

...but the conversation of getting people together to educate people not like because you can hear and people are coming together and it's like oh wait there's not really a home to love this to be able to educate different community groups of state agencies to have that kind of thing, because I don't think the issues are about homeschooling. When you said, what are the questions, I'm like, I don't have questions about what we need for homeschooling, because that's not really a thing.

Representative Biggins:

I wasn't saying anything about homeschooling.

<Inaudible chatter>

Attendee:

No, but I think these questions are the same. No, no, from the beginning. In the beginning, when you were on the agenda, I'm like, I don't even know what questions. I don't have questions about how to help homeschooling. But education for people about, What is homeschooling? What does it look like in Connecticut? How is this working? What are the laws? How do they get applied? Those kinds of opportunities for conversation might be good so that you can start to build this coalition among representatives so that none of the state representatives have no idea what's happening in

homeschooling. They're like, oh, no, this is a positive for our state. I mean, this is a beautiful idea. <inaudible chatter> Separate.

Attendee:

<inaudible> on the North wing and DCF can be on the South wing. Yes.

Attendee:

I think that... I think homeschoolers...

Attendee:

...all that you're doing not only for your children but for each other as homeschoolers, you all need to <inaudible> that's what you want. And we want, I would think, to have our state agencies serving our public well. And if there's loopholes or problems we need to address. And I think that's where we can be effective.

Attendee:

They're fine. They're doing fine.

Attendee:

I think we need to address it.

<Inaudible Chatter>

Diane Connors:

I just want to, I just want to quickly. ...

<Inaudible chatter>...you guys can stay away from us...

Diane Connors:

I just want to quickly remind everybody that unless somebody is denying their child being in the world as a homeschooler, which I don't know anybody, if anybody in this room knows somebody, then speak up. However, we are out on field trips, co-ops, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera.

Many of us are mandated reporters. Our kids are among mandated reporters all the time. And it's not just the few in the public school, it's everywhere we go. There's somebody, museums, libraries, you know, it reminds me of years ago, the myth of socialization of homeschoolers. Oh, it's so nice, but they're not socialized. It was never true. It was never true. And now it's like, well, we have to have eyes on them. Why? It's the myth.

Attendee:

I think they have so, honestly, I think DCF and our state government has so many more children. Right. And I do think that's what we, our job, in my opinion, is to hold our state agencies to each of their jobs.

<inaudible chatter>

We are giving them the money that we're giving them to do the job that they're doing. And that's it. We're going to find out why. I mean, I'm not trying to cut anybody out of the conversation, but it's the conversation that they can teach us a whole lot more than DCF.

Representative Biggins:

I think that the conversation should continue. If the other people don't want to continue the conversation, that's fine. But I would like to continue the conversation.

<Inaudible Chatter>

Attendee:

We need a bigger room, right?

Attendee:

We need a clear understanding that homeschoolers are not the fall guy for any of these other situations. Because it really is disheartening having your child hear these things and be associated with these type of pieces. I think that clearly, that's not the situation for us as homeschoolers.

Representative Biggins:

Well, if I could say one thing based on what we've said here today, I think that one of the things that got brought up is that you don't need to say anything to the school in order to move your child, right? I don't know if that's true.

<Chatter> No, you have a problem. You have a problem. I think what you misunderstood was that we don't need to write a notice of intent.

Representative Biggins:

Like, we're parents that just raise their kids and just enter homeschooling instead of kindergarten.

Deborah Stevenson:

Can I explain?

Representative Biggins:

Yes.

Deborah Stevenson:

Okay. The law is that when you have a child, it's just like if you were going to move into the state, you have a child, young child, child turns five or six, you enroll them in a private school. That parent does not have to go and report to the public school or to the government that, hey, I just put my kid in the private school. It's the same for any other parent who's doing a different kind of education, their education on their own. The people who are enrolled in the public school, in order to avoid truancy, the truancy statute, must notify the public school that they are then withdrawing from that public school. Thank you very much, but I'm choosing a different thing. That would be true for the private person who puts up a child in a private school, and it's true for the person who puts up a home school.

Attendee:

Does it indicate what they're going to do or not? Does it say I'm pulling them out, I'm educating them?

Deborah Stevenson:

There is, there are three statutes involved. They're already in the books. And that's 249, 250, and 251 are relevant here, okay? 10-249...

<Chatter> ...This is what she does all day long.

Diane Connors:

It's on our website.

Deborah Stevenson:

My kids can repeat this now. 10-249 says that once a year, each local board of education is required to reach out to the community and find where the children who are residing in the district, whatever age, where they're residing in the district, is being educated. That's on the local board of education to do once a year in January, okay? If they reach out to the parents and say, where's your child being educated? Then 250 and 251 applies, and the parent then is required by law to say the name of the child, the age of the child, and where the child is being educated. That's been on the books for years. It's irrelevant to, and there is a difference between the notice of intent and a letter of withdrawal. And that's where I think you're confused. The letter of withdrawal is what the parent informs the school, public school, when they're enrolled that they're no longer going to be enrolled. And for thirty years we have told them in that letter to say the name of the child, the age of the child, and where the child is being educated. That's what we have recommended and that's what most parents do. They're not required by law to do that until they're asked to, but we tell them ahead of time so they know. The difference is that notice of intent in the form that was adopted in 1990. I was intimately involved there, too, on these issues, so I know it from personal experience. 1990, the state had the same conversation. Oh, we should regulate. No, we shouldn't. No, we shouldn't. And the result of that was the State Department of Education came up with a policy that they adopted, not a law. The title of the policy was, and is, Suggested Procedure for Home Instruction. So the city department, to end that conversation, said, okay, here's a suggestion. We

suggest you file, but underneath the title, you see, they put language in there. You must file a notice of intent. There's no backing in law to that. And if you don't file a notice of intent, we can call you truant. That's not in the truancy statute either. So this is why a lot of...

<inaudible chatter>The truancy statute ... suggested letter...

Deborah Stevenson:

... the letter went out that you can find.

Attendee:

Could they put this up on the SDE website now and say, well, this is what we want you to do?

Deborah Stevenson:

They definitely use language. They don't say it's a statute. But this is our guidance. And what that term means to public schools is, oh, it's guidance. We have to do it. So that's where the confusion comes in that I have been battling and all the homeschools have been battling for years.

Diane Connors:

They treat it like a law and it's not a law. And then they threaten that if you don't do it, they're going to report you to DCF.

Attendee:

Thank you. I appreciate that.

Deborah Stevenson:

And even when the local board's adopted their own policy, that policy doesn't apply either. It's not a law. It's not enforceable. And the parents are no longer in the jurisdiction of the public school in order to follow that policy. So I have been to every commissioner except in probably the past two and explain to this SD commissioner what has been happening, why don't you just put it out there and clarify that to the public schools so we don't have this, we don't have, you know, legal, I gotta go to DCF, the whole thing. And

everyone I talked to is, and I've had this input too in writing, the last one went to the lawyers in the department And then they take the advice of the lawyers and say, oh, no, you can report them to DCF if they don't file a notice of intent. That's why I'm saying, look at the law department, because they are not doing their job. And they are giving misinformation that has cost homeschoolers for years a whole lot of grief. And DCF wasted time and money by trying to figure out what's going on. In the end, they do not have to talk. It's not law. And this has been asked to adopt that as law and rejected it, and then reinforced parental rights through the years. So that's what we're-

Attendee:
Bipartisan.

Deborah Stevenson:
Bipartisan, yes, okay? So this is why the homeschool community is very frustrated. When you try to connect us with the library situation or whatever, when the lawyers give the misinformation, no, no, that's not right. And you see that? These lawyers and the agencies need to be looked at and held accountable.

Attendee:
Can I make one? Not a question, but a comment. Because you started the conversation introducing yourself and saying that I'll hate you.

Representative Biggins:
I know. It was a joke, right?

Attendee:
I know. So, and I understand, you know, you probably get a lot of flack <inaudible> when you're there. But after May 5th, particularly, and then years and years and years and years of dealing with this, the offense goes both ways. I'm sure there are people that judge your motives and say things about you, but we feel like after we've made it very clear, we've given you all the evidence, we've done everything, that for this meeting to

be called, and at least I'm happy to hear you say that you're not sure at this point in the legislation, but the way that it was worded sounded very much like homeschooling and some kind of legislation is going to happen related to homeschooling. So that to us was something. Between Diane and I, we have what, fifteen children? And we now have grandchildren, right? We have grandchildren. So I understand, like, when you have a toddler and you want them to put their shoes on, you never tell them to put their shoes on. You say, do you want the yellow shoes or do you want the red shoes, right? <inaudible> I'm sure you know that because of your counseling background. That's what we feel like is going on here. We're being insulted and being like, well, do you want this kind of legislation or that kind of legislation? We don't want anything. Okay? That legislation probably needs to happen. There's big problems that need to be fixed. But not on our end.

Attendee:

And the legislation would be harmful, would do more harm.

Attendee:

Right. Yes. It would take resources away from the things that need to be fixed. That's horrible. You need more resources. Let's do things at work.

Attendee:

I do have a question for the homeschoolers though. How is civics education going?

<laughter>

<Chatter> This year is awesome. This year is the best.

Attendee:

We've got to remember that this process paints us as abusers. This whole process, the media, everything. I have people that I love and care about going, you homeschoolers, you hide your children, you're abusers. That's what you're doing by dragging us through this.

Attendee:

<inaudible>At least they've got things to ask too. Right.

Attendee:

It's a bipartisan issue, and it's pinning two parties against one. When it comes to the homeschooling community, it's very diverse.

Attendee:

It's not about, this is not political. I'm sorry, but it's not.

<chatter>It shouldn't be. No, it shouldn't be. It shouldn't be.

Attendee:

It's about children's education and welfare. And education and welfare are two different things, and we need to address the welfare first. That's right.

Attendee:

Amen. Amen, sister.

Attendee:

You should pull in some psychologists there, too, I think. Oh, good. Excellent. Like some trauma, abuse and trauma people, because they know what the signs are. They know what it looks like. And if you're looking to stop trauma and abuse, you should look for the signs and the symptoms.

Attendee:

And will abusers follow regulations in a society?

<Random Chatter> ...Would that be helpful if we created or did some legislation I don't think that we have that ... No, that's what I mean ... The State Department of Education, we can tell them on their policy ... Well, why haven't we done that... Thank you...