

**March 17, 2014**

**TESTIMONY OF R. DAVIS YOUNTS BEFORE THE PENNSYLVANIA  
HOUSE  
EDUCATION COMMITTEE REGARDING HOUSE BILL 1013**

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee, Ladies and Gentlemen:

My name is Davis Younts. I am an attorney, military veteran, husband and parent of two amazing daughters. I am proud to say that I was a homeschool student, that my wife and I are homeschool parents and that my parents were home education pioneers in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

Thank you for permitting me to testify before this committee concerning proposed changes to the home education law of Pennsylvania. I appear before you today to speak in favor of House Bill 1013.

Pennsylvania's current homeschool laws treat homeschool students and families as second-class citizens and unfairly single homeschool students for unequal treatment under the law. The current law was, over 25 years ago, and continues to this day to be one of the most draconian and arbitrary statutes in the country. I am here today in the hopes that the efforts of my parents and struggles of my siblings can shed light on the impact of Pennsylvania law on the very children that the education system should support not hamper.

My parents moved to Pennsylvania in 1985 when I was 9 and my sister was 11. They hoped to continue our education at home...when they attempted to comply with state law they were met with blatant hostility and threats. The school district superintendent informed my parents that they had to sign affidavits and follow a strict schedule that documented precisely what would be taught in the home and at what time. In the affidavits, they required my parents to agree that a representative of the school district could enter our home at anytime, without warning or notice and that if my mother could not produce written proof that we were being taught precisely what was required during a given 15 minute increment, according to a school district mandated schedule, my sister and I could be taken by Child Protection Services and removed from the home. My parents attempted to work with the school district to find reasonable compromises. My sister and I took standardized tests at the local elementary school with all the other students and scored in the 97 percentile or higher in all subjects, but that did not matter.

Eventually my parents felt they had to resort to legal action to protect our family. They partnered with the Home School Legal Defense Association and joined a lawsuit that resulted in portions of the old statute being declared unconstitutionally vague. At a time when homeschooling was a rare and relatively new phenomenon, my parents fought for what they believed in and as a result my 3 siblings and I received an amazing education, graduated from college and have successfully lived out our educational, personal and professional goals.

Despite the ultimate success of the lawsuit and gradual changes in the law, my sister and I were forced to deal with the realities of a state educational system that did not treat homeschool

students as anything other than an anomaly and a nuisance. My sister, Dr. Spring Dahl, is a recognized expert in the field of food science and food safety, she has worked for the USDA, conducted cutting edge research and is a college professor, but she still does not have an official high school diploma. In order to get accepted into college as a Pennsylvania homeschool student, she took the ACT, SAT and multiple placement tests and entrance exams. Ultimately, she attended a small community college in Colby, Kansas so that she could earn enough college credits to transfer to a respected liberal arts college. She was forced to struggle to simply get a quality college education because of state laws that were hostile to a student that was in all respects and according to all standardized tests an exceptional student. The high quality of her home education was ultimately validated when she received her PhD from Michigan State University.

My parents and I chose a different path for me. After completing kindergarten through the 10<sup>th</sup> grade at home, I attended a public school for two years, received a high school diploma and attended and graduated Summa Cum Laude from a University as a traditional student.

My younger brother graduated from college as the valedictorian at age 19 and is now Navy fighter pilot and decorated combat veteran. My younger sister is a commercial helicopter pilot and a successful business owner with a Master's in Business Administration. In order to achieve this success, they started taking college classes at local community colleges while in high school so that they could transfer into college without a high school diploma.

Each of us received an education that was overseen by parents who believed in the importance of an individually tailored education, while ensuring that all of us were prepared to be successful academically, and in our chosen professions.

I come before this committee today as a parent who, after serving in the United States Air Force for 10 years and deploying in support of Operation Enduring Freedom, chose to move my family home to Pennsylvania in October of 2013. My strong desire to return to Pennsylvania as a graduate of The Dickinson School of Law of the Pennsylvania State University and raise my daughters here was born out of my love for the Commonwealth, its history of personal freedom, and the quality and character of the people. The one thing that gave my wife and I the greatest concern and hesitation was the fear that we would be unable, as parents, to have the freedom to ensure that our daughters receive an education that is tailored to meet their unique educational needs. After much prayer and research, we decided that we would move home but that we would be forced to seek out a school district that was willing to at least tolerate non-traditional educational choices and had a reputation of being reasonable in its dealings with homeschool families.

House Bill 1013 is 25 years overdue. It is not perfect, but it takes significant steps towards the fair and equal treatment of homeschool students. Tolerance and respect for personal and religious freedom is a part of the history and the very fabric of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. A vote in favor of this legislation would be in keeping with that great tradition.

On behalf of my parents, siblings and ultimately my daughters, thank you for your time and consideration.