

S.R. 16 and H.R. 1008 Restricting Homeschoolers Under the Educational Freedom Account Program

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Synopsis: H.R. 1008 and S.R. 16 are identical resolutions authorizing introduction of legislation amending Arkansas' Educational Freedom Account (EFA) law. The EFA program lets Arkansas students use public funds to pay for an education at a public or private school or at home. Both measures would reduce EFA funding for homeschoolers to no more than \$5,000 per year, and they would implement minimum test scores for students participating in the EFA program. They would disqualify students previously enrolled in a private school from applying for EFA funding. The measures would also add education service providers who serve homeschoolers to the State's list of mandatory reporters of child abuse. Below is additional information to consider.

Current Law

- Legislators created the Education Freedom Account program in 2023 so Arkansas' students could use public funds to pay for an education at a public or private school or at home.
 - Students generally are eligible for 90% of the previous year's public education Foundation Funding.
 - For the 2025-2026 school year, that amounted to \$6,864 per student.
- Students can spend EFA money at participating schools and educational providers.
 - This gives students and their families the opportunity to tailor their education according to their needs.

What S.R. 16 and H.R. 1008 Would Do

- Cap EFAs for homeschooled students at \$5,000 per year.
 - Private school students could still receive 90% of the previous year's Foundation Funding.
- Require students participating in the program to meet minimum requirements on a state-mandated test
 - Students who do not perform well on the test would have their EFA funding reduced or would be disqualified from the EFA program altogether.
 - The State Board of Education would be empowered to set test requirements and penalties.
- Disqualify students previously enrolled in a private school from receiving EFA money.
 - Students would not be eligible for EFA funds if they were already enrolled in a private school before applying for an Educational Freedom Account.

- Expand the list of mandatory reporters to include education service providers who work with homeschoolers.

Additional Points to Consider

- During the 2024-2025 school year:
 - 3,422 homeschooled students used Educational Freedom Accounts
 - Homeschoolers spent \$14.5 million on educational expenses.
 - 10,834 private school students used Educational Freedom Accounts
 - Private school students spent \$69.9 million on educational expenses.
- Capping EFAs for homeschoolers will not save the State of Arkansas a substantial amount of money, but it will discriminate against homeschoolers who want to participate in the program just like everyone else.
- The testing requirements in H.R. 1008 and S.R. 16 are unclear and unfair.
 - H.R. 1008 and S.R. 16 let the State Board of Education make rules about testing requirements and the penalties for performing poorly on the test.
 - Public school students are not penalized for underperforming on state assessments.
 - Under H.R. 1008 and S.R. 16, students who perform poorly on the test could have their EFA funding reduced or eliminated altogether, forcing them back into the public school system.
 - This undermines the Legislature's goal of creating school choice in Arkansas.
- Singling out homeschoolers under the mandatory reporter law treats homeschooled students differently and implies they are somehow at greater risk of abuse or neglect.

Conclusion: These proposed laws are homeschool control measures dressed up as accountability measures. They turn educational freedom into a state compliance program. The State is using EFA dollars as a way to standardize and regulate homeschooling rather than provide parents the freedom to tailor the education that is best for their children. The message behind this is that you may homeschool, but only on the State's terms if you want EFA funds.