



Capitol Network News

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REP. LAURA BOYD MEETS WITH HOME SCHOOL ADVOCATES, DISCUSS POSSIBLE REGULATIONS

By Shawn Ashley
Staff Writer

■(GIT) Home school advocates told an Oklahoma lawmaker Monday that a system is already in place to verify that parents who claim to be home schooling their children are living up to that obligation and that no additional regulations are needed.

"I don't think (any additional regulation) is necessary," Joe Esposito, a home schooling parent from Owasso, told Rep. Laura Boyd, D-Norman, during a meeting at the state capitol Monday. Citing Tulsa County as an example, Esposito said district attorneys, under the state's truancy laws, have the ability to verify that a student is being home schooled.

"The system is in place. It does work. It just needs to be implemented properly," said Esposito.

Boyd called the meeting after some state officials, including Governor Frank Keating, suggested that some regulations may be needed to verify that parents who claim to be home schooling their children are living up to the obligation and to prevent abusive

parents from using home schooling as a shield from child abuse investigations.

The issue arose in the report of a task force appointed by the governor to review the case of Shane Coffman, an eight-year-old Cleveland County boy who authorities claim was beaten to death by his mother and her boyfriend. The child's partially decomposed body was found in February buried in a freezer outside a trailer once occupied by the boy and his siblings, his mother and her boyfriend.

According to members of the task force, the Department of Human Services and law enforcement officials backed away from their investigations into the case after being told the boy was being home schooled. That led the governor's task force to conclude, "In this case, home schooling was used to effectively hide the death of one child and the abuse of several others from those who were attempting to investigate their abuse. The public policy which allows for home school-

ing in the absence of any oversight needs to be critically examined."

Governor Keating said during a Nov. 1 press conference, "If there has been a history of abuse and neglect, I think someone should go out there and say, 'Where's the blackboard or crayons.' I don't think any home schooling parent would object to that, and I would support legislation that did that."

Nearly 20 home school advocates, primarily home schooling parents, participated in Monday's meeting; some brought their children. Like Esposito, the majority expressed concern over the idea of imposing some sort of regulation on home schooling.

Scott Somerville, an attorney representing home schooling parents for the Virginia-based Home School Defense Association, agreed with Esposito, adding that the efforts of Tulsa County prosecutors to verify parents' home schooling claims needed to be

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SENATE PANEL DISCUSSES LANGUAGE LEGISLATION

By Shawn Ashley
Staff Writer

■(GIT) Members of a Senate interim study committee were urged Monday to consider adopting legislation that would make English the state government's official language.

"Fluency in the English language will do more to empower people coming to America — and Oklahoma — than any government service that may be provided to them in their first language," Mauro E. Mujica, chairman of the board and chief executive officer for U.S. English, told the interim study committee on English as an official language (96S-105). The organization describes itself as "the largest national, non-partisan, non-profit citizens' action group dedicated to preserving the unifying role of the English language in the United States."

"Unfortunately," Mujica added, "the effect of many of the government's well-intentioned multilingual programs is to handicap those very people these programs are designed to help. The programs destroy the

incentive to learn English by sending the message to newcomers that you don't have to learn English to succeed. The fact of the matter is that you do need to know and to master English to succeed in America."

Mujica called English "the catalyst that has brought us together as Americans." Legislation adopting the language as the state's official language, he added, "encourages newcomers to learn English, while at the same time establishes a common-sense language policy for the government."

At the same time, Mujica said, any legislation should allow reasonable exceptions that would allow some services to be provided in languages other than English, such as public health, safety and emergency services, judicial proceedings, education to students with limited English proficiencies and foreign language instruction.

Twenty-three states, Mujica said, have adopted legislation designating English as their official language, while similar efforts

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