

Home School, continued from page 1

replicated across the state.

"Do you know what they do in Oklahoma County?" Somerville asked. "Nothing. But the fact is it's against the law for a child not to receive an education, either in the public schools, private school or at home."

Somerville called the interaction between home schooling parents and social workers "a recipe for disaster," pointing largely to the distrust that exists on both sides of the relationship. Instead of dealing with social workers, Somerville said home schooling parents would be better served by the adversarial relationship with law enforcement officers or prosecutors, framed within the context of one's constitutional rights.

Somerville cited the efforts of Virginia to codify such a relationship. In that case, information obtained by a social worker cannot be used against an individual in a court proceeding. That, he said, puts the burden on social workers and law enforcement officers to ensure that individuals' constitutional rights are properly protected and that a search warrant be obtained in order to gather evidence for use in a criminal proceeding.

Somerville told *Capitol Network News* following the meeting, "There's not a single state in the country where the laws concerning home schooling could have deterred the death of Shane Coffman."

Rev. Johnny Hinton, a home schooling parent from Wewoka, expressed a similar sentiment, noting that states which regulate home schooling, such as Wisconsin, do so on the basis of the education being provided, rather than on the basis of child welfare or protection.

"If anyone is interested in protecting children, it is the people who have chosen this route," Hinton added to the agreement of those in attendance.

Mike Jestes, a home schooling parent from Oklahoma City, said those involved in home schooling could do more to educate the public about their efforts, adding, "At the

present time, I see no reason to do anything intrusive because it is working and working well."

Education and information about home schooling, Somerville also said, are important, particularly for public officials who deal with parents and children in their day-to-day duties.

English, continued from page 1

have passed the House in Oklahoma — HB1385 in 1994 and HB2154 in 1995 — but have failed or died in the Senate.

Mujica faced sometimes harsh questioning from members of the Senate committee and even harsher criticism from some in the audience.

Sen. Keith Leftwich, D-Oklahoma City, asked what impact such legislation would have on multilingual efforts already approved by the legislature, such as allowing drivers' license tests to be offered in Spanish, as well as five other languages. Mujica said most legislation would not impact such efforts, because drivers' license tests are usually one of the exemptions provided for in the bills.

"I agree," said Mujica, "that we have to give some time for immigrants to this country to assimilate, but we also have to have an incentive for them to learn English. If people had been able to keep their original languages, this country would not have been built."

The difference now, Mujica added during further questioning, is that lawmakers have unintentionally eliminate the incentive for immigrants to learn English by making so many services available in immigrants' native languages. Additionally, he said, that has led a growing number of immigrants to refuse to learn English.

Asked by Leftwich whether it might be easier to repeal existing laws that mandate certain government services be provided in a variety of languages, Mujica said doing so would create the risk of a claim of discrimination by those who saw their native language eliminated from the list of those used in government services.

"There is no existing equilibrium," Mujica said. "By accommodating and doing things in a number of languages, you are already discriminating against some."

Mujica's views were particularly not well received by those in the audience.

Barbara Warner, from the Bureau of Indian Affairs, said efforts such as that promoted by U.S. English threatened bilingual education funding, and in turn, the contin-

ued existence of Native American languages.

"My tribe," she said, "has only 2,300 members. When we die, that language is going to die, while Spanish and German and others will continue to live on."

Bilingual education, she said, promotes language preservation and the likelihood that the Ponca Tribe's language would continue to exist.

Oklahoma City attorney Teresa Rondon disputed Mujica's claim that current laws discourage immigrants from learning English. Citing her personal experiences as an English instructor, Rondon said English as a second language courses "are the most well attended in Oklahoma City. Hispanic parents want their children to learn English because they know it is the key to their success in this country."

Mujica noted the irony of the criticism of the efforts of himself and of the organization he heads, explaining that he, too, is an immigrant.

"I, too, an immigrant — I came here from Chile some 31 years ago to study architecture at Columbia University — and know firsthand how important it is to know English to succeed in the United States," he said.

Committee chairman Sen. Ben Brown, D-Oklahoma City, noted that the panel is neither currently looking at any one piece of legislation or at drafting English as an official language legislation. He did note, however, that such legislation is expected to come before lawmakers during the 46th Legislature.

"It is a fact attested in history that sometimes revolutions most disastrous to freedom are effected without the shedding of blood. The substance of your government may be taken away, while the form and the shadow remain to you."

Andrew Johnson
speech in Washington, D.C.
Feb. 22, 1866

Capitol Network News

A division of

GIT, Inc.

P.O. Box 61206

Oklahoma City, OK 73146-1206

Office (405) 528-2546

Fax (405) 521-9807

Net: gitinc@ionet.net

Web: <http://www.exoweb.com/git>

Darwin P. Maxey, Publisher

Mary Millen, Editor

COPYRIGHT© GIT, Inc., 1996. No part of this publication may be reproduced, transmitted, transcribed, stored in a retrieval system or translated into any language in any form by any means without the written permission of GIT, Inc. The data contained herein is obtained from government sources, but it is not warranted as to the accuracy by the publishers.