**Open Letter to the Homeschool Community**

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I have some questions. Do you?

NHELD has been following the Harvard Summit and the philosophy espoused by the participants to presumptively ban, or have parents seek permission and be stringently regulated, if they want to homeschool.

NHELD always has stood for, and fought for, freedom from all government regulation of the right of parents to educate their own children, and always has rejected compromise. We draw a line for freedom, and stand firm.

We have researched, thought, discussed, and have tried to put the puzzle pieces together about whether HSLDA will do the same, especially concerning the Harvard Summit.

Here is some of what we know, and some things about which we would like answers.

Who first widely circulated the announcement that the Harvard Summit was to take place?

Answer: HSLDA (Homeschool Legal Defense Association, founded by Michael Farris, and employing other attorneys, such as Michael Donnelly.)

What did HSLDA say about the Summit in that first announcement?

Answer: HSLDA **“would love to attend”** the Summit; it “looks like a fascinating line-up of speakers”; and “we know that many parents homeschool to protect their children from abuse, so if you have questions about the summit”, you can contact Harvard for further details, including about the “limited number of hotel rooms for summit attendees.”

Upon hearing the agenda topics, and researching the speakers who will attend the Summit, many parents became alarmed and upset that the Summit proponents will be discussing ways to take away parental rights and freedom to homeschool, and so began several protest movements.

Parents are furious, so is NHELD, but what about HSLDA? Are they furious about it, or not? Hard to tell.

What has HSLDA said since making the initial announcement and indicating they “would love to attend”?

Answer: Michael Donnelly has posted a few times, stating things such as:

“I and others have r**equested invitations to the conference** but have been rejected”;

“we will be watching it’s (sic) progress and programming carefully”;

“we reject the premise of the conference”.

Parents asked HSLDA’s Michael Donnelly if he has any recommendations for parents to take any action. What was Donnelly’s response?

Answer: “In a nutshell **I didn’t recommend any specific action** at this time”.

HSLDA’s President, J. Michael Smith, later came out with another reply. What did that state?

Answer: “By publishing an article highlighting Professor Elizabeth Bartholet’s call for a presumptive ban on home education Harvard Magazine **may have actually done the homeschooling movement a favor**”.

He then quoted other in the homeschooling community taking Bartholet and the Summit proponents to task.

Smith, however, never offered a word of his own against the Summit or its proponents.

What is the only statement by HSLDA that hints at their position, other than they “would love to attend” the Summit?

Answer: In HSLDA’s initial announcement, Donnelly stated, “We continue to exercise to defend the homeschooling community from unwarranted and unreasonable government intrusion.”

While thousands of homeschooling parents have stated their opinions about how wrong the Summit and the proponents philosophy is, and vowed steadfast opposition and action against it, and looking at HSLDA’s statements, NHELD has some questions.

Why hasn’t HSLDA come out with any strong statement in opposition to the Summit?

Why has HSLDA been so meek about it?

Why would HSLDA “love to attend” the Summit, instead of openly, and vehemently, protesting its existence and philosophy?

Let’s look at some other pieces of the puzzle.

Why wouldn’t HSLDA come out with a full frontal attack on people who want to completely eviscerate the rights of parents, not only to educate their children, but also to be called a parent?

Let’s look at some of the history of HSLDA.

Are there any patterns here?

Well, we know that Michael Farris, the founder of HSLDA has a particular philosophy about the rights of parents. He clearly stated his philosophy when he explained why he wants to amend the Constitution to give power to the federal government over parents and children that the federal government never has had. He said,

“**Parental rights should not be absolute”, and “**We certainly **do not want to return to the language of the Massachusetts Bill of Rights of 1780 [that said] ‘Parents should have the right to make all decisions for their children’**…”

No, he doesn’t want that. Apparently, in his opinion, parents certainly cannot have the right to make all decisions for their children”. He further explained and posed the question, in light of that premise, “**Have we chosen the correct method of limitation on this right?”**

Think about that. He wants to “choose” the “correct method” of limiting the right of parents? Is that true? They are his own words.

Why would he have that philosophy?

Could it be based on his religious philosophy, and that HSLDA is a religious based organization?

We do know through some of the writings of Farris and HSLDA that one criteria for joining the group was acceptance of their religious philosophy, and that there are certain cases, such as divorce cases involving homeschooling, HSLDA will not defend.

We also know that they have alluded to biblical scripture, at times, in defense of homeschooling, as have some of their affiliated state organizations, based, in part, on advice of HSLDA.

For example, one such group quotes the following scripture as a rationale for complying with “guidelines”, not even enforceable law, but “guidelines” issued by government officials, rather than standing up for the right of parents not to comply with such unenforceable law.

The scriptures quoted are:

*“If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone…let everyone be subject to the governing authorities…whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted.”  Rom 12:18, 13:1-3 (NIV)*

*“Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and always to be gentle toward everyone.”  Titus 3:1-2 (NIV)*

*“Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right.  For it is God’s will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people.  Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God’s slaves.  Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honor the emperor.”  I Peter 2:13-17 (NIV)*

The questions is, does that philosophy permeate HSLDA through time, up to and including now?

Is this why HSLDA does not put up a strong fight against the Harvard Summit?

Is this why HSLDA does not stand for complete freedom from government regulation?

As stated above, HSLDA says it will "defend the homeschooling community from unwarranted and unreasonable government intrusion”.

What does that mean exactly? Does it mean they won’t defend the homeschooling community from all government intrusion?

Who decides whether the government intrusion is “unwarranted” and “unreasonable”, and on what basis?

Is this why we have seen a pattern of behavior of HSLDA through the years of saying they will protect the rights of homeschoolers, sending an attorney into a state, but having that attorney secretly meet, or sometimes openly meet, with legislators, only to “compromise” with them for less regulation than originally was proposed, leaving the homeschoolers, nonetheless, with regulation instead of freedom?

Do the research for yourself. This is a pattern that has happened repeatedly. Here are just a few examples:

Connecticut - legislator proposes regulation of homeschooling; homeschoolers protest, write, lobby, and show up in force to defeat it, only to have Michael Farris fly in to lobby two days before the public hearing lobbying legislators in secret, cutting in front of the line of speakers at the hearing, saying he represents all the homeschoolers in the state, and that he and the legislators came up with a compromise bill to regulate parents less than the original bill. Parents defeated the compromise bill anyway.

New Hampshire - HSLDA wrote New Hampshire’s homeschooling law in 1990 complete with curriculum approval, annual testing, probation and termination provisions. In 2011 they proposed to add misdemeanor charges for negligent homeschoolers. Parents fought against that HSLDA proposal and won.

Many other stories are available as well showing a pattern of HSLDA saying they will fight for the rights of homeschoolers, only to compromise with legislators on implementation of some regulation.

Check out these sites, for example for additional information:

<https://a2zhomeschooling.com/thoughts_opinions_home_school/hslda_homeschool_legal_defense_association/>

<https://hsislegal.com/freedom-asp/>

The point is this: There are legitimate questions to be answered by HSLDA. Are they going to actually fight against all regulation of the right of parents to education their children, or, are they only going to fight against some regulation - the regulation they deem “overly burdensome” or “unnecessary”? What is their definition of those terms, and do you agree with them?

Why won’t HSLDA come out with a stronger statement against the Harvard Summit?

I’d like to know. Would you?

*Attorney Stevenson is the founder of National Home Education Legal Defense, LLC. For more information you can go here:*

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