

Dear members of the Senate Committee on Rules,

I am writing to urge you to quickly pass HB 2655A to the floor of the senate without Amendment 15A. This school year was a very confusing one for parents who are rightly concerned about the new Smarter Balanced Assessment, which is not only far too long but is also highly flawed. I can attest to that fact as someone who was required to administer the test.

Parents who wanted to opt out of the assessment were given different information about how to opt out and what requirements they had to fulfill in order to do so depending on what district, and often even what school in the same district, their children attended. It is very important that parents are allowed to exercise their rights under the Fourteenth Amendment (affirmed by two subsequent US Supreme Court cases) to direct their children's education. It is equally important that parents' right under the First Amendment to free exercise of their religion be respected. Many parents who tried to opt out this school year found their religious beliefs being questioned and some were told that their "strong personal beliefs" did not qualify as religion. I believe that a court would find it unacceptable that agents of the state would put themselves in the position of arbiter of what qualifies as acceptable religious belief and what the difference is between strong personal belief and religion.

This bill will give parents the right to opt out for any reason, eliminating that potential violation of their constitutional rights, and making certain that parents are well informed about their rights, the reasons for their child being assessed, and how that assessment will be used. If the issue is the short turnaround in getting forms and explanations created, I can almost assure you that it would not be difficult to find educators who would be willing to volunteer their time during the summer to help create those forms and explanations, as we have all now seen how flawed these assessments are, how inappropriate they are for our Special Education and ELL students, and how incredibly disruptive the length of the assessments is to our school schedules, taking away weeks of instructional time.

Please send this bill, without Amendment 15A, to the senate floor quickly for a vote. It passed the House by a wide and bipartisan margin. This should not be hard.

Sincerely,
Kathleen Jeskey
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