

## Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

**Submission No:** 1307  
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### Attachments:

### Submitter Comments:

This letter addresses proposed changes to home education. Seemingly, adoption by families of an approved, prescribed educational program assures that home educated students will receive a high quality education, commensurate with those who attend school. Yet, if parents are prohibited from making reasonable modifications to whichever program they adopt, their children's educations may be compromised, eroding the intended purpose of this change in legislation for home educated students. For the sake of brevity, let's consider just one aspect of a home education program, curricula, but the general idea can easily be extended to other aspects of a program. As one component of an approved program, a prescribed curriculum will serve as well as it can to meet the general needs of most of its students most of the time. Yet, in its approved, prescribed form it is not customised to meet the needs of individual home educated students. Parents know their children individually, and therefore parents are best placed to know which aspects of a curriculum are suitable for their children as individuals. Doubtless, other commentators will have raised the point that parents have the entitlement to decide, within reason, what their children should be taught. Let me be clear. That's not the message I'm bringing. What I have to say is that, in the education environment of the home, it is parents, knowing their children as individuals, who are best placed to make decisions in their children's best interests regarding curricula. As a practical matter, since parents will probably be mandated to adopt an approved program, at the very least there should be a process in place for them to make significant modifications to it, when it is reasonably in their children's best interests to do so. Minor modifications should be allowed without oversight. Narrowly, this could mean for example, that a vegetarian family decides not to have their child read a specific short story about a holiday feast with a passage about a roast pig at the center of the table. Broadly, there may be instances when parents decide that teaching an entire learning area would not be in their child's individual best interests. Consider Alexander (not the child's real name), who has autism. In the interests of safety, Alexander's parents are making a priority of teaching him to swim. Currently, teaching him to swim requires many hours each week and there are only so many hours per day that may be devoted to education. Introduction of a prescribed program might force Alexander's parents to divert much of the very important time spent in the pool, they worry, to teaching a subject required by a prescribed curriculum - such as a foreign language - which they cannot envision benefiting Alexander, ever. Knowing how to swim could save his life one day, they reason. Shouldn't there be a process available to them to modify his educational program to suit his best interests? Perhaps Queensland's lawmakers are already drafting exception clauses or alternate rules for Alexander and students similarly situated to him. And though Alexander's predicament may be the most compelling example, there are also good reasons why all home educated students in Queensland should have a pathway available to modify the prescribed program they use. A common reason some parents choose to home educate is to prevent or delay certain influences on their child. They may feel their child, as an individual, is not psychologically or emotionally ready for some subjects addressed in the curriculum. Suppose a curriculum includes a topic which would be appropriate for most students of the target age, but for which some parents feel their child is not yet mature enough. For example, this could occur where a curriculum requires students to learn about Anne Frank, or read her diary, but the student's parents determine that it is in their child's best interest to postpone introduction of the topic of the Holocaust. Certainly no curriculum would take a racist point of view, but themes of racism, or of the Stolen Generations, though portrayed in a negative light and set in a historical context, might be introduced in curricula. Yet, at my home educated son's age of ten, I don't even want him to become

aware yet, that even historically, some people might have considered themselves superior to him because of his dark complexion. I know that his self-image and sense of self worth are not yet sufficiently developed for these themes, and it would likely bring him long term harm. Since I know he's not ready to know about that yet, if I were to encounter it in his curriculum, shouldn't I have discretion to not teach him the material? These are only a few specific examples, employed to express that there are a wide variety of good reasons parents may have for modification of their children's educational program. In this legislation, lawmakers really should create pathways for parents to adapt their programs to the needs of their children. I applaud Queensland lawmakers for taking steps to ensure a solid educational foundation to support each lifespan of all Queensland students. But lawmakers should keep in mind that, expressly, all foundations are customised for the individual structure they will support.