

Parental rights under attack in Olympia

PARENTS ARE A CHILD'S first teacher, guiding them throughout the stages and lessons of life. For generations, parents have taught their children right from wrong, instilled responsibility, and nurtured and cared for them. While parents aren't the only influence in a child's life, parents should be able to choose what's best for their child.

There are several bills that have been proposed in the state Legislature that have the potential to erode the rights of parents. These proposals represent government overreach, as if the government knows better than mom and dad.

Senate Bill 5683, known as the Welcome to Washington Baby Act, would send a nurse or a government worker to your home to observe you and your newborn child during those first few months unless you opted out in writing. Such a proposal sounds reasonable on the surface, until you read deeper into the bill. These workers would observe you in all aspects of your interaction with your child. These subjective observations would be noted in a file kept by the Division of Child, Youth and Family Services to which you would not have access. What you may not know is that there is already a voluntary program to help provide services to families with children. One might ask why an intrusive program is necessary to target the 2.7 million families in

the state instead of using an existing, successful program to reach the thousands of additional families who are in need?

The recent measles outbreak has reignited a vigorous debate on vaccinations and whether public health and safety outweigh the right of parents to choose what is best for their children. SB 5841 would make it difficult for parents to receive an exemption for their child from being vaccinated. The proposal removes the personal and philosophical exemption option many parents currently claim. Instead, the only options for parents under this bill would be to claim a religious or medical exemption. Parents would have to either prove they are an active follower of a particular religion, or have a specific document signed by a health care provider. Government should not force a child to be vaccinated over the objections of parents.

SB 5889 claims to have the overarching mission of strengthening confidentiality in communications between health insurance services and their enrollees. While confidentiality of health records is something we all support, what truly lies inside this proposal is something that negates parental rights by granting any minor the ability to procure health care services and procedures, without parental knowledge or consent. So parents will receive health care related bills to pay without any information of the services received! Just imagine a suicidal child seeking counseling and/or medical treatment without parental knowledge. The only information the parent

may ultimately get is the description of the health service on a billing statement! SB 5889 fosters secrecy between parents and children instead of fostering healthy relationships and open communication. This proposal puts children at risk and undermines the parents' desire to protect and care for their children.

Finally, SB 5395 mandates teaching of sex education from kindergarten onward under the guise of safety. Sex education curriculum is not needed to create safe spaces for students to share sensitive information with an adult. That is an excuse to teach students material that parents may consider inappropriate. While parents can opt their children out of these classes, this curriculum could be adapted to other class instruction. Whether you are a teacher, school counselor or voluntarily work with students, most organizations require some form of training on how to recognize warning signs of trauma or inappropriate treatment. As a former 4-H Club leader, I can tell you personally that I received such information and training.

Bills such as these emboldens government to determine what it thinks is best and infringe upon the ultimate responsibility and role of parents in caring for their children. It is the job of parents to take care of their children in all of these issues. Not Olympia's.

SEN. SHELLY SHORT, R-Addy, serves the 7th Legislative District, which includes Ferry, Stevens and Pend Oreille counties and parts of Okanogan and Spokane counties.



Sen.
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