



# **Legislative Assembly of Manitoba**

**STANDING COMMITTEE  
ON  
PRIVILEGES AND ELECTIONS**

**Chairman:**

**Mr. J. Wally McKenzie  
Constituency of Roblin**



**Wednesday, October 24, 1979 8:00 P.M.**

**Hearing Of The Standing Committee**  
**On**  
**Privileges and Elections**  
**Wednesday, October 24, 1979**

**Time: 8:00 p.m.**

**CHAIRMAN, Mr. J. Wally McKenzie.**

**MR. CHAIRMAN:** We'll call the Committee to order, and can we ask if Mrs. Marlene Buffie is in the room tonight? Would you care to come to the microphone and make your presentation, Mrs. Buffie?

**MRS. MARLENE BUFFIE:** Mr. Chairman, Honourable Minister, worthy committee members: Our brief relates to Part III, Bill 22, Transportation of Pupils.

The Manitoba Public School Act in its present form is discriminatory, inconsistent, and inadequate in its provision of transportation to Manitoba school children.

The Act arbitrarily limits the provision of transportation grants to those children residing more than one mile from school.

3 In a rural area such as St. Francois Xavier, children living within one mile of the school are placed in grave danger because they must walk unsupervised on Highway 26 where:

1. There are no sidewalks.
2. There are no shoulders, as there is a steep slope from the pavement into the ditch.
3. The speed limit is 90 km per hour and is exceeded in many instances.
4. There are no safety crossing zones.
5. There are long stretches of uninhabited, untreed land where a child is unprotected in inclement weather.

6. Abduction is a real danger as there are long stretches of non-residential area, offering no haven for a child.

No parent can allow a child of six to twelve years to walk a mile to school under these conditions.

The Act reveals a serious inconsistency in its provision of transportation to school children:

1. Article 43(1) limits transportation to children who have more than one mile to walk to school, however:

2. Article 46(1) stipulates that parents shall be compensated where they must convey their children to and from a point more than half a mile from the residence of the pupil.

3. Article 46(4) limits the duty of the school division to provide for the conveyance of a pupil to and from a point not closer than half a mile from the residence of the pupil.

How can this government justify withholding transportation grants from children residing one mile from the school while insuring that others will not be obligated to walk more than half a mile?

Since Canada is now using the metric system, perhaps the time is ripe for the Manitoba Public School Act to incorporate metric distances in its transportation provisions.

Surely all children are entitled to be conveyed to school safely. In this, the International Year of the Child, that right should become a reality for all Manitoba school children.

Respectfully submitted.

**MR. CHAIRMAN:** Thank you, Mrs. Buffie. Are you prepared to accept some questions from the committee? Questions for Mrs. Buffie. Mr. McBryde, the member for The Pas.

**MR. McBRYDE:** I'm assuming that you've made representations locally in terms of this transportation but your concern is that the school division's concern would be that the provincial grants would not come through for this kind of transportation. Is that correct?

**MRS. BUFFIE:** That's right.

**MR. McBRYDE:** So what are you doing at this time?

**MR. CHAIRMAN:** Just for the record, Mrs. Buffie, I have to announce so that the recording equipment will know whose name is going into the record, so I may interrupt you or the Member for The Pas from time to time, so it's just a formality so the recording equipment understands. Proceed.

**MRS. BUFFIE:** Right. At this time, the children residing within a mile of the school are being picked up. As a group of parents, we have gone to the school board on two occasions with this problem and they have agreed to continue to transport our children as has been the practice in the past as long as there is room on the buses, and that condition is being met at this moment. But St. Francois Xavier, as you probably know, is an area twenty miles approximately from the city and it's an area that has in the past few years become quite heavily populated with people who are moving out and so more people are moving into these areas within the mile and this is what is placing a hardship as far as school boards go, on their transportation provisions. The buses are being filled up with children who live within a mile and they're not receiving the grants for these children. In the past they sent out a memo saying they would no longer be able to provide transportation for those students that were living within a mile. Then delegations of parents have gone to the school board meetings and they are at the present time providing transportation because there is room on their buses right now.

**MR. McBRYDE:** About how many students would be affected by this?

**MRS. BUFFIE:** I believe, while I'm not positive of the exact number, probably in the vicinity of, I would say there could be twenty in this area.

**MR. McBRYDE:** I'm assuming then that what you would like is some relaxation, that is, the stipulation being there with an "except when the Minister rules for exceptional circumstances" they could give grants for less than a mile.

**MRS. BUFFIE:** Well, in our case, yes. I don't know what the case is in other rural areas but because of these conditions on Highway 26, which is a provincial trunk highway, and there is a lot of traffic and heavy fast moving traffic at the time that these children would be walking and that would be adequate in our case, but it seems to me that the Act is a little inadequate. Surely ours isn't the only area in Manitoba where this problem exists.

**MR. McBRYDE:** It might be one of those areas where you have a good paved road that's that narrow that makes it "special circumstances" that you're concerned about. That's all the questions, Mr. Chairperson, thank you.

**MR. CHAIRMAN:** Any further questions for Mrs. Buffie? Mr. Boyce.

**MR. BOYCE:** Have you approached the department on this particular point, Mrs. Buffie; the Department of Education?

**MRS. BUFFIE:** We have approached only our school board, not anyone else.

**MR. BOYCE:** You haven't asked the Minister to review this situation?

**MRS. BUFFIE:** I phoned the Minister's office and spoke to his executive assistant, Mr. Masters, about it and he referred me to this committee.

**MR. BOYCE:** But up to this point in time you haven't had any response from the Minister's office on your problem?

**MRS. BUFFIE:** Not other than the referral to this committee, no. I spoke to Mr. Masters one afternoon and he suggested I present a brief to this committee.

**MR. BOYCE:** Well hopefully, Mr. Chairman, when we review the legislation which eventually comes out, we can take your concerns into consideration. But may I suggest that you drop the Minister a note . . . well, he may not be aware of it because this is a rather busy time of year with budget and everything else with a lot of things demanding his attention so if you did write him a note

I'm sure that he would look at it.

**MR. COSENS:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mrs. Buffie I would appreciate receiving the details from you of this particular situation. On the first page you mention a number of things that, if they were attended to, would make the situation somewhat less hazardous in your eyes. Have you talked to your local municipal people in regard to sidewalks, in fact to the highways department, about safety crossing zones, any of those things that would make this particular situation perhaps less hazardous to the children?

**MRS. BUFFIE:** I, personally, have not spoken to my municipal representative but representation has been made to him in the past; and, no, we have not gone to the Department of Transport up to this point.

**MR. COSENS:** Do you have school safety patrols to get the children across this particular road, is anything like that set in place?

**MRS. BUFFIE:** No.

**MR. COSENS:** These are considerations that might improve the situation to some extent. I am not suggesting that they would remove all the hazards, but these are steps that have been taken by communities with problems, perhaps not exactly similar to yours, but with some of ciate receiving the details, in letter form, from Mrs. Buffie.

**MRS. BUFFIE:** I'll be happy to comply with that.

**MR. COSENS:** Thank you.

**MR. CHAIRMAN:** Any further questions for Mrs. Buffie? We thank you Mrs. Buffie for your presentation and hope your problem can be resolved.

**MRS. BUFFIE:** I thank you for your time.

**MR. CHAIRMAN:** I call a Mrs. Konyk, The Concerned Parents' of Winnipeg re Transportation. Can we have your name, Sir?

**MR. BERNIE PLISCHKE:** Yes, my name is Bernie Plischke, I reside at 2098 Henderson Highway, Winnipeg.

**MR. CHAIRMAN:** Thank you, Sir. Proceed.

**MR. PLISCHKE:** Mr. Chairman, honourable Ministers, members of the Committee. I am speaking on behalf of the many parents concerned with the transportation of their children to the French and French Immersion School. At this point in time, our efforts are being frustrated by a lack of precise transportation policies afforded in the school Act. We feel that since the responsibility for transportation is presently left to the school division there is no financial assistance provided them for encouraging those students to take programs which are not offered in their respective division. The result is that parents are stuck with a transportation problem.

We wish to emphasize that while these programs are available they are accessible to only a select few. Some parents pay up to \$50 a month as a fee to a private bus company while others cannot participate in the program due to lack of funds.

We are very happy to note that transportation grants were set up for mentally handicapped children and technical vocational regional school students and we would like to see this good will extended to include a grant for these students going to a bilingual program and therefore, make it available for everyone whether it is in their own division or to another one.

**MR. CHAIRMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Plischke. Questions from the committee? Mr. McBryde, the member for The Pas.

**MR. McBRYDE:** I am assuming that some school divisions do make this provision now, somehow out of their budgets.

**MR. PLISCHKE:** Yes, there is, in fact. . .

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**MR. McBRYDE:** Could you sort of just summarize the general picture in the Winnipeg area?

**MR. PLISCHKE:** Right.

**MR. CHAIRMAN:** I have to introduce your name, Mr. Plischke, for the recording equipment, so carry on. I just announced your name so don't let it bother you, sir. Carry on, Mr. Plischke.

**MR. PLISCHKE:** Okay, thank you. Actually in some of the school divisions they have transportation within their divisions but the only one that we know of is Transcona that actually has a school bus leaving Transcona and going into the St. Boniface area.

**MR. McBRYDE:** So are there other divisions, and I'm sorry for my ignorance in this matter, are there other divisions besides St. Boniface that offer French language and French Immersion courses within the city?

**MR. PLISCHKE:** From what we can understand at this point is that we have in Transcona, River East, Seven Oaks and Fort Garry. In River East, there is no program there. That's why children are transported; not with the school bus.

**MR. McBRYDE:** In how many divisions will the parents have to provide some other alternate transportation or their own transportation to a child to get to the French Immersion or French language course?

**MR. CHAIRMAN:** Mr. Plischke, if you want to bring your committee, and they can sit on those chairs on the side, Mr. Plischke. The microphones are all turned on and the evidence goes into the record; no problem.

**MR. PLISCHKE:** I don't know all the answers, but I know these gals have been busy working on. . .

**MR. CHAIRMAN:** You're welcome to bring the rest of your committee with you and they could speak . . . would you please speak into those microphones that are nearby and give us the evidence; that's what we're looking for, so proceed. May I have your name first?

**MRS. JEANNE A. PLISCHKE:** I'm Mrs. Plischke.

**MR. CHAIRMAN:** Thank you. Proceed.

**MRS. PLISCHKE:** Well, I think all the areas; we don't know for sure, but in this case we've contacted Transcona, Fort Garry, Seven Oaks and River East.

**MR. McBRYDE:** I have no further questions.

**MR. CHAIRMAN:** Mr. Boyce, the member for Winnipeg Centre.

**MR. BOYCE:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I notice that you live out on Henderson Highway. Could you describe your own problem to me? Where do your children go to school?

**MR. PLISCHKE:** Our children go to school in St. Boniface, in this bilingual program and they actually take three school buses to get there now which is perhaps about an hour and a quarter. It usually takes about 20 to 30 minutes longer than, say, if a normal bus just left from the area and went straight into the area. They actually have to change buses three times to get there, which takes well over an hour.

**MR. CHAIRMAN:** Mr. Boyce.

**MR. BOYCE:** I notice that there are two or three families in your general area have children, at least they have signed the petition.

**MR. PLISCHKE:** Yes, that's right. I think there are approximately, is it 20 students?

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**MRS. PILSCHKE:** 30.

**MR. PILSCHKE:** 30 students in our general area.

**MR. BOYCE:** Well, I have to confess I'm not too familiar with all the problems but I have it in my mind's eye now that from where you live to where you have to go it's . . . Through you, Mr. Chairman, to the Minister, is it the present practice where a school division has a certain number of applications for an immersion program that they will offer that program?

**MR. COSENS:** Mr. Chairman, that's left to the discretion of the particular school division, whether they start the program or not, depending on the number of requests.

**MR. BOYCE:** Not to nail it down, but in the experience that has been gleaned over the last number of years, does it usually come down to a viable unit as far as the provision of a course is concerned?

**MR. COSENS:** I imagine a viable unit is perhaps a very good way of putting it, Mr. Chairman. The division has to feel that it has enough students to start the course and then be able to carry those students through the subsequent grades. If they feel they have enough, of course, there are grants and so on that would support that type of program.

**MR. BOYCE:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, I thank the Minister. It would appear, from what I understand of what public policy should be, and what we should strive toward, that if a student can't get a program in their particular division, for whatever reason, that they should be entitled to transportation to where that is available.

**MRS. PLISCHKE:** We had a survey in our area and transportation is excluded, so there is not enough response to start an immersion program in our area and we do want transportation, but some people can't take the program because there's too much — like a Grade 1 child taking three buses is a bit too much and so they don't take it. There's no grant and the school board has told us that this is temporary, that there will not be transportation if the buses don't work out.

**MR. BOYCE:** I see that you point out that in vocational education this is not the case.

**MRS. PLISCHKE:** For the regional schools.

**MR. COSENS:** It comes under the regulations.

**MR. BOYCE:** In your conversation with various people on this matter, has anyone come up with a reasonable explanation why it should be applicable for vocational education but not for language education?

**MR. CHAIRMAN:** Mr. Plischke do you care to answer that, or Mrs. Plischke.

**MRS. PLISCHKE:** No, they tell us that the mentally handicapped, for instance, have a grant; and they have told us, go and ask for a grant, get a grant and you'll have transportation, that's all they've told us at the school board.

**MR. BOYCE:** What attempts have you made to have either the department or the ministry resolve this situation?

**MRS. PLISCHKE:** We haven't really done anything that way. We came here. This was after going to the school board. They told us to come here, and we were informed that there were committee hearings, and perhaps we could get it settled, or come and ask here.

**MR. BOYCE:** Through you, Mr. Chairman. I'm glad you came. Personally, I was aware of this because I live by General Hospital, the Health Sciences Centre they call it now. They keep changing the world. And I had to take my youngster over to Tache. So I know what you're talking about, but I thought that some of these problems may have been worked out. When I say I'm glad you've come, we'll take your considerations, your concerns under consideration in recommending to the government what they perhaps should do in this regard. But in the meantime, I would suggest that

you, too forward your concern to the Minister's office, because the ultimate appeal is to the Minister. I'm not trying to load him up with work, but nevertheless, that's what we pay him this great, big huge salary for.

**MRS. PLISCHKE:** Is this not an appeal to the Minister?

**MR. BOYCE:** I'll defer to the Minister on that.

**MR. CHAIRMAN:** Mr. Cosens.

**MR. COSENS:** Mr. Chairman, through you to the delegation. I must admit that I have been aware that there has been a problem, that there is a problem mounting in this particular area, and to make provision in this particular case, would require not a change in the Act, but a change in the regulations that apply to the Act. We will certainly be prepared to give it full consideration. It will necessitate getting numbers of pupils who require this transportation, distances, this type of information, which we can certainly avail ourselves of. And once having that information, then we will give it very careful consideration. The limiting factor, of course, is always dollars, but I think the Member for Winnipeg Centre has mentioned earlier, why has this problem not been brought to the fore earlier? I would suggest it's because the increase in immersion enrolment is a recent phenomena. It's not something that has existed for a large number of years. And it is probably that increase and that desire by more parents today than ever before that is perhaps increasing this particular problem, and causing it to reach larger proportions.

I'm also very pleased that you came here. The committee has been bemoaning the fact that we haven't had the opportunity to hear presentations by parents, and you people, I'm sure fall into that category and you have a parental concern. We'll be pleased to look at it. Thank you.

**MR. CHAIRMAN:** Mr. Plischke, anything further you'd like to . . .

**MR. PLISCHKE:** I was just wondering, Mr. Chairman, what can we look forward to at this point in time? Will there be a time frame involved now? You said you wanted to study the distances and the number of students involved.

**MR. COSENS:** Mr. Chairman, through you to Mr. Plischke, there certainly is a time frame involved, as there is with all government determination of any question. Some of the gentlemen sitting on the other side of the table who have been in government longer than I have appreciate that as well. It also involves budgeting processes and so on that are part of the whole government process. It will take some time. But I would hope that we can come to some favourable solution.

**MR. CHAIRMAN:** Mr. Walding.

**MR. WALDING:** Mr. Plischke, I notice addresses on these sheets from all over the city. I'm wondering whether you went all over the city and knocked on people's doors and asked them if they were interested about this, or whether the children of these people go to one particular school.

**MR. PLISCHKE:** As we had mentioned earlier, that there are people who are interested but perhaps because of the budgeting factor they don't have the money to privately transport their children, that they're sort of turned away from the program. But if they realized that there is transportation, they'd become more involved in this particular program, and some of them are sending their children from various areas.

**MR. WALDING:** Let me put the question a little differently. Mr. Plischke, the people that have signed this petition, do their children all go to one school?

**MRS. PLISCHKE:** No, they don't. Some people have signed in Fort Garry, some in Seven Oaks. It was different people involved, and others in River East. And we didn't get around to Transcona because we were short of time.

**MR. WALDING:** How did you know who to contact to get signatures on here?

**MRS. PLISCHKE:** We phoned schools where there were immersion programs, and we were given the names of people who were having difficulties that way.

**MR. WALDING:** How many schools would this represent that you went through?

**MRS. PLISCHKE:** This would represent schools in Transcona, schools in Seven Oaks, schools in River East, and River Heights.

**MR. WALDING:** So four schools . . .

**MRS. PLISCHKE:** Well, no, four divisions.

**MR. WALDING:** Okay. You mentioned that you had gone to your local school board asking them to do this and that they refused. I suppose because they didn't want to put anything on the extra levy for their own ratepayers in the division, and that they wanted the government to find the money, yet on the other hand, this government we know, is trying to pass costs on to other levels as part of their restraint program, they don't want to pay for it either.

**MRS. PLISCHKE:** We were told that they had sent this survey around to see how many people would be interested in an immersion program, and because they excluded transportation, the result of the survey was quite poor in our particular area, and so because of this, they decided that the people in our area would not like to see the school board spending money on a school bus, transporting children to a bilingual program, therefore, they would not guarantee transportation.

**MR. WALDING:** I don't know whether it's comparable, but my son goes to a school in another division, and our local school division gives him a handful of bus tickets at the beginning of term. That's the way he handles it. Now, is that a possible way for your school division to handle it?

**MRS. PLISCHKE:** If your child is old enough to do that, that's fine. I would drive my children. I'm not — well, I'm involved to a certain degree, but I would not give up the program. I would make arrangements to get them to school. But others can't. And this is why we're here. Not everyone can do that.

**MR. WALDING:** Who do you feel is the proper authority to provide the money for this transportation, the province or the local school board?

**MRS. PLISCHKE:** Well, according to the school board, they feel that we should get a grant for it.

**MR. WALDING:** I see. What do you feel, that the taxpayers of the whole province should be paying for it, or the taxpayers of your division?

**MRS. PLISCHKE:** That's a very difficult question. I really don't know.

**MR. WALDING:** Surely the answer to that question would govern where you put the pressure on to get the payment for it.

**MRS. PLISCHKE:** Yes, I suppose. But the attitude, I presume, in our area is negative towards these programs.

**MR. WALDING:** No further questions.

**MR. CHAIRMAN:** Mr. Kovernats.

**MR. ABE KOVERNATS:** Just a couple of questions. I'm quite interested in the immersion program. How did you choose to send your children to the St. Boniface School District rather than some other school district for the immersion program?

**MRS. PLISCHKE:** Well, we had two choices, actually. We could have sent them to Sacre-Coeur which was in the Winnipeg School Division, but if you send them to St. Boniface, you have your children directly involved with French-speaking children, already speaking French I mean, and perhaps it's easier for them to become immersed. So I chose St. Boniface.

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**MR. KOVNATS:** In what way would the children be more surrounded by French-speaking children in St. Boniface than in the other area, because there is a French school rather than immersion school?

**MRS. PLISCHKE:** Right. Well, we sent ours to a French school.

**MR. KOVNATS:** Which French school are your children at?

**MRS. PLISCHKE:** Provencher.

**MR. KOVNATS:** To my knowledge, I would think that Provencher is the 50-50 program, rather than the complete immersion.

**MRS. PLISCHKE:** That's right.

**MR. KOVNATS:** But it is your choice as to where you send the children.

**MRS. PLISCHKE:** That's right.

**MR. KOVNATS:** There's nothing hindering you from sending your children to any of these schools for this particular program.

**MRS. PLISCHKE:** That's right.

**MR. KOVNAT:** Were you promised any transportation when you made the decision to send your children to these immersion or 50-50, or the French course?

**MRS. PLISCHKE:** Originally, we were not, and then we were granted a bus. I would say at about four years ago. And then two years ago, our children took the same bus as the mentally handicapped children to Softley School, but this year the school hours were changed, and the bus for the mentally handicapped could not accommodate our children any further, so they are temporarily riding to River East school buses. They transfer twice. And then they transfer on to a St. Boniface bus bringing children to the regional school — that's why it takes so long, and there's a half an hour wait after school at the regional school before their own bus picks them up again. So that they are sort of in a — when you see a little Grade One or a little Grade Two student waiting half an hour at a regional school after school, it's a little bit difficult. And it's only temporary.

**MR. KOVNATS:** Okay. Just as a closing remark, I just want you to be aware that the Minister is aware of the situation, and is considering it very seriously.

**MR. BOYCE:** You asked the question awhile ago, whether this was the place to bring your grievances. This committee is meeting to hear representations on the redrafting of The Public Schools Act, and the procedure, I would suggest that people in this province follow is, if you have a concern, and it's a legitimate concern, if you take it to the Minister's office, if the system doesn't work, and discuss it with the Minister or his representative, and then if you don't get satisfaction from him, get in touch with some opposition member and talk to them, regardless of who the government is.

**MRS. PLISCHKE:** May I answer?

**MR. CHAIRMAN:** Yes. Mrs. Plischke.

**MRS. PLISCHKE:** Perhaps the situation now is different, but I did approach the Minister of Education with the previous government to no success.

**MR. BOYCE:** You will notice that I said, "then talk to a member of the opposition" regardless of who the government is. But you made a comment — well, Churchill said it's a terrible system but it's the best we've got and it's up to all of us to make it work. But you said earlier that the people in your area don't seem to want it and it kind of prompted me to think, why are some of us — I have five children myself and the youngest of these is bilingual — but why is there not that much acceptance in the parents?

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**MRS. PLISCHKE:** Well, once again, if the survey which was sent around had included transportation they would have had an immersion program. But they required 25 people to start it in one school, which would be out of the way perhaps; and when transportation is not provided people don't always go for the difficulties that are involved.

**MR. BOYCE:** Mr. Chairman, I have to confess that if a box of corn flakes is facing me on the shelf I have to turn it around. It doesn't bother me that much but are you suggesting that if we, collectively, make it easier for people to become involved in immersion courses, that more would become involved in immersion courses?

**MRS. PLISCHKE:** Yes, I think so. As a matter of fact some people can't participate in this program and some people have threatened to quit — well, they've decided to quit — one little girl in Grade I, travelling for 1-¼ hours, being transferred three times and coming home weary after waiting half an hour, I mean the parents can take so much. But when they have other little ones at home they can't transport them themselves, they have to give up.

**MR. BOYCE:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

**MR. CHAIRMAN:** Mr. Cosens.

**MR. COSENS:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Through you to Mrs. Plischke. Is that the proper pronunciation of your name? Plischke.

**MR. PLISCHKE:** Close enough.

**MR. CHAIRMAN:** Well, for the record, how do you spell your name, Mrs. Plischke?

**MRS. PLISCHKE:** P - l - i - s - c - h - k - e.

**MR. CHAIRMAN:** Oh, I'm sorry. My apologies.

**MR. COSENS:** My apologies, too. I was just wondering if you would like to comment — it's not connected with your transportation but we do range far afield in this particular committee — you mentioned that your child is in immersion but you say in the 50-50 program.

**MRS. PLISCHKE:** Yes.

**MR. COSENS:** Can I ask you, Mrs. Plischke, what would be your reasoning for choosing 50-50 rather than a full immersion program?

**MRS. PLISCHKE:** Well, first of all I made sure that my children knew some French before they started Grade I, I sent them to a private nursery school. I live in a province which is English speaking. I don't believe my children should take everything in French. I have decided that this is the best program.

**MR. COSENS:** And do you feel that it's accomplishing its purposes, that they are becoming quite capable, quite fluent in both languages?

**MRS. PLISCHKE:** Very much so. I would say that they would perhaps top students with the same ability in an immersion program.

**MR. COSENS:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

**MR. CHAIRMAN:** Further questions? We thank you for your presentation.

**MR. PLISCHKE:** I'd like to thank the Chairman, the honourable minister and members of the committee for hearing our brief.

**MR. CHAIRMAN:** It is indeed an honour, Mr. Plischke. I'd like to call Evelyn Reese (Individual) who has proposed a presentation. A Mrs. Mary Figurel, No. 41 on the list, The Manitoba Association for Schooling at Home. Proceed Mrs. Figurel.

**MS MARY CATHERINE FIGUREL:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

**MR. CHAIRMAN:** No. 41 on your list, gentlemen.

**MS FIGUREL:** Copies of my brief are with the Clerk.

**MR. CHAIRMAN:** Okay. Maybe we'll just wait a second until they're distributed, Ms Figurel. Proceed Ms Figurel.

**MS FIGUREL:** Thank you. The Manitoba Association for Schooling at Home addresses this committee of the Legislature on the proposed Public Schools Act, Bill 22, from the viewpoint of our objective to see that necessary safeguards are included in the Act that specifically allow for the alternative of home education.

We would like this committee to recognize that:

Home education is an idea whose time has come again. At one time, as recently as thirty years ago, receiving the major portion of one's education at home was a completely acceptable norm and often a necessity. It is still necessary today for those living in remote areas. However, home education is no less valid for children not living in remote areas simply because parents choose it rather than public or private schooling.

The rewriting of Manitoba's Public Schools Act began about seven years ago, to our understanding. At that time the modern home education movement was in its infancy. It has grown dramatically since then and by all indications will continue to grow. In as little as five years time home education most likely will be a concept readily accepted by the general public. It would be unfortunate if this Schools Act did not embody a positive reference to home education, thus unnecessarily causing the Act to become quickly outdated.

Many lengthy disputes could result if the Legislature fails to recognize that home education is an important part of educational evolution.

The parent has the primary responsibility for the rearing and education of the child and has the right to choose the kind of education the child receives, as long as the best interests of the child are the basis of the choice and the intent of the education chosen is to lead the child into a happy, independent, productive adulthood.

We cannot emphasize strongly enough this fact.

It is with these ideas in mind that the part of Bill 22 that concerns the Manitoba Association for Schooling at Home, Part XIV, School Attendance, was scrutinized.

In investigating this part of the proposed Manitoba Act we also looked at the school attendance sections of the school acts of all other Canadian provinces and territories. We discovered that all provinces and territories allow for home education, although often in a vague manner.

To specifically allow for home education it should be included under Definitions, Section 258(1). After (c) "court" we would add:

(d) "home education" means an education provided for a child primarily at home, not in a public or private school

(e) "home education program" means an educational process for which the parent or guardian is ultimately and solely responsible.

Now it is necessary to look at the rights of the parents, and responsibilities, for determining the manner in which the child is educated.

In 1948, the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 26, Section 3, declared:

"parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education which shall be given their children."

Canada was among the nations which ratified this Declaration. It seems inconsistent then that this right is so vaguely conceded in Bill 22.

Let us look at several areas where the rights of the parents and responsibilities should be more clearly defined.

Section 260(1) is headed Responsibility to Send Child to School. Seeing that a child is sent to school and seeing that a child is educated is not necessarily one and the same. To properly define the responsibilities of the parent in the education of the child will require that a few words be added to and changed in Section 260(1) of Bill 22, so that it would read as follows:

Responsibility for Education of Child

260(1) Every parent of a child of compulsory school age and every person who has or receives a child of compulsory school age in his house, whether that child is his own or that of another person and the child is resident with and in the care and custody of the parent or person, as the

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case may be, shall ensure that the child attends school or shall ensure that satisfactory provision is made for the education of the child in accordance with the provisions of this Act, the regulations and the rules of the school board.

As Section 260(1) is written in Bill 22, a parent is obligated to send the child to school (which, as defined in Section 1(15), is public school). If the parent does not send the child to public school, he (or she) is, according to Section 260(3), violating Section 260(1). This appears to make the parent guilty of causing the child to be truant, even though the parent is making other satisfactory provisions for the education of the child.

Section 261(1) goes on to provide for exemptions that allow for attendance at private schools and, we suppose, home education, which we presume is covered by clause (b), Section 261(1). The meaning of the law needs to be clear, not presumed.

Furthermore, alternatives to public school education should not be put under an exemption heading with such things as sickness and religious reasons as acceptable excuses for non-attendance.

To emphasize the education of the child rather than the possible prosecution of the parent, Section 261(1), Exemptions, should be divided. Clauses (c), (d) and (e) would remain under Exemptions. The other two clauses would make up a new section to be inserted directly below Section 260(1). It could simply read as follows:

**Satisfactory Provisions**

260(2) Any person to whom it applies shall be considered to be in compliance with Section 260(1) where:

(a) the child attends regular instruction at a private school, as defined in The Education Administration Act; or

(b) the child is receiving a home education where (i) the child is enrolled in the Manitoba Correspondence Branch or another Correspondence School where qualified teachers are ultimately responsible for ensuring that the child is involved in an educational process; or (ii) the child is involved in a home education program as defined in Section 258(1)(e).

A section such as this would ensure that the rights of the parent, and valid educational alternatives, are provided for in a positive tone. It would further ensure that the parent who was responsibly choosing an alternative form of education, in a private school or at home, would not be regarded as guilty of causing the child to be truant.

Section 267 is another place where the basic human rights of the parent could be violated. This section gives extraordinary powers to school attendance officers. What concerns the Manitoba Association for Schooling At Home most is the way a school attendance officer may enter, "without warrant any other place where children may congregate". Could this be misconstrued by an overzealous school attendance officer to mean a private dwelling?

It would seem more appropriate to employ the school attendance officer as a counsellor rather than a police figure, and for the person in this position to use the powers of persuasion rather than coercion.

It seems appropriate here to point out that the word education is derived from a Latin verb meaning to lead out of. The use of force is certainly not in keeping with this meaning and only serves to foster disrespect and prejudice for all things done in the name of education.

Naturally when including home education as an alternative to public or private schools, procedures must be established to ensure that within the home education program satisfactory provisions for a sound education are being made.

We strongly recommend that home education programs be part of the affairs of the local school division. The Department of Education would become directly involved only if there were some dispute over a home education program that could not be resolved at the local level.

Perhaps sections similar to the following might be worked into Bill 22:

**Inquiry into Home Education Program**

1. Where the parent or guardian of a child considers that the child is excused from attendance at school according to Section 260(2) (b) (ii) and the school attendance officer is of the opinion that the child should not be excused from attendance, the school attendance officer shall direct that an inquiry be made as to whether or not the education which the child is receiving is satisfactory, and for such purpose require the principal of the school which the child would otherwise attend to inquire into the education of the child and report the result of the inquiry to the school attendance officer who shall state that

(a) the child is deemed to be receiving a satisfactory home education; or

(b) the child is deemed not to be receiving a satisfactory home education.

**Grounds and Recommendations**

2. Where the child is deemed not to be receiving a satisfactory home education, the parent or guardian shall be notified in writing as to the grounds of this opinion accompanied by specific

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recommendations of what steps he must take to make such an education satisfactory.

Period of Probation

3. A period of probation shall be allowed for the parent or guardian to comply with the recommendations of part 2, after which he may request another inquiry in the home education of the child.

Appeal

4. Should a home education program be deemed unsatisfactory according to , subsection (2) or (3), the parent or guardian shall be informed of his right to appeal this decision according to Section 274.

We find it encouraging that the Legislators recognize the right of the parent to appeal as reflected in Section 274.

It may be helpful to note how another province, Ontario specifically, provides for inquiry procedure. If there is a dispute about a child's non-attendance, the Ontario Education Act states that "one or more persons who are not employees of the school that the child has the right to attend (are) to conduct a hearing and to report to" the Provincial School Attendance Counsellor the results of the inquiry.

We would like to suggest the establishment of a committee composed of a public school representative, a home education representative and one or more members outside the realm of education, to help set down specific Departmental regulations that would apply to home education programs. Among the regulations drawn up there should be provision for a board of review similar in make-up to the committee to hear any appeals on home education that may come to the Department of Education. The Board will report its findings and recommendations to the Minister who would make the ruling concerning the appeal. We are certain that any one of a number of our Association would be ready to serve on such a Board.

We have attempted to outline changes in particular sections and clauses, and to add new sections and clauses which are relevant to the idea of specifically allowing for home-education as an educational alternative.

Let it be clearly understood by all concerned that it is not the intention of the Manitoba Association for Schooling at Home to undermine the public school system. Actually home-education programs serve to supplement other programs which have already been established. It would be nice if we could work together, each in our own way, with one goal in mind, the education of our children. To have effective cooperation Part XIV of this Public Schools Act must embrace the proposals we have set forth.

We, as parents who want to keep the home as the center for child-rearing and education, contend that we have the right to decide, responsibly, what manner of education we want for our children. Further we contend that effective instruction can be wrought through a sound home-education program.

The idea of home-education may seem new, even unorthodox, to those hearing about it for the first time. However, the Manitoba Association for Schooling at Home is confident that after studying the principles and proposals set forth in this brief, this committee will be able to come to a single, obvious conclusion: that in a country where human rights hold such great importance, the alternative of home-education must be specifically allowed for by the Province of Manitoba.

Thank you, gentlemen.

**MR. CHAIRMAN:** Thank you, Ms Figurel.

Questions?

Mr. McBryde, the Member for The Pas.

**MR. McBRYDE:** Thank you, Mr. Chairperson. Could you just tell me a little bit about the organization itself and how many people are involved in it?

**MS FIGUREL:** Yes, there are a number of people involved. We have people who are quite actively involved. There are other families who are considering the alternative of home-education. Actually, our group is very small, about a dozen families make up the core of our group.

**MR. McBRYDE:** Would there be about a dozen that are now trying to do home-education and others that might want to join in, are about a dozen that are interested in the concept?

**MS FIGUREL:** There are about a dozen. . .

**MR. CHAIRMAN:** I have to announce you, so you carry on. It just goes for the record, Ms Figurel. Carry on.

**MS FIGUREL:** There are a dozen families in the Province of Manitoba who are seeking approval for home-education programs. There are four who have approval. Those dozen that I speak of are not all members of our group. There are other families whose children are not yet of school age, which is my case. There are other families who have sent their children to Kindergarten and found that it was not the kind of experience they wanted for their children and therefore they did not choose to send their child back again this year to First Grade, and so they have kept their children out of school.

**MR. McBRYDE:** Perhaps with that fairly limited number then you could sort of, like, what would be the advantages. Why would parents want to do it at home?

**MS FIGUREL:** Well, you gentlemen probably don't have enough time for me to explain all of that to you, but there is a great deal of reasoning involved in why we want to keep our children at home for their education. Some parents feel that their children will not get as good an education in the school system the way it operates today as they can give them at home. Other parents have had experience, having their children in school, and found that it was detrimental to the child's entire being. They were becoming very emotionally upset and parents who are truly concerned about their children do not want them in that kind of state and therefore they chose to withdraw their children.

**MR. CHAIRMAN:** Mr. McBryde.

**MR. McBRYDE:** I don't think she was finished yet.

**MS FIGUREL:** No, I am not finished. Thank you.

**MR. CHAIRMAN:** Oh, I am sorry, I apologize, Ms Figurel.

**MS FIGUREL:** That is all right.

There are other parents, who for religious reasons, choose not to send their children to school. There are other parents who feel that they don't like the way the schools are run and therefore they choose not to have their children to be a part of that.

But there are a number of reasons. School is, at this point in time and will probably be for a long time, compulsory, and some people object to that. They feel that the kind of structure that goes on, because of the compulsory nature of the schools, is not what they want for their children.

**MR. McBRYDE:** You mentioned early in your brief the review of the legislation in other provinces, is there any that have legislation similar to what you are proposing for inclusion in this Bill here.

**MS FIGUREL:** Seven of the ten provinces, including the present School Act that is in force in Manitoba, do make reference to education at home, but the way in which it is made reference to is very vague and very subjective to whimsical interpretations at times by the departments, because parents in the Province of Manitoba and in Alberta, and in Ontario, some areas they have trouble and other areas they find approval immediately or within a reasonable amount of time.

**MR. McBRYDE:** I am not sure what it said in the old Act. Could you tell me if this is an improvement or is it worse. . .

**MS FIGUREL:** No, the new Act is not an improvement. The new Act is more vague than the present Act. The new Act says under Section 261(1) that "no person is liable to any of the penalties set out in this Act, for failing or refusing to send his child to school or other educational institution as required under Section 260, where (a) the child is in regular attendance at private schools. And then it goes on to (b) "The Education Administrative Consultant certifies that in his opinion the child is currently receiving a satisfactory standard of education."

Now, in the present Act it says that, this would be Section 6 of the school attendance section of the present Act, "No parent, guardian, or other person is liable to any of the penalties of this Act in respect of any child or other person required by this Act to attend school regularly if. . ." and I will go on to (b) here, "he produces a certificate of the school inspector that in his opinion

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the child is being educated at home or elsewhere in a manner equal to the standards of the public schools of the province.”

Now, at least the present Act that is in force does say, “at home”, and acknowledges that educational processes can go on at home.

In Bill 22, there are quite a few of things we object to in that one particular little clause. It says that the Education Administrative Consultant, which is the new name for the Inspector, certifies that in his opinion, there is one subjective point there and it could be very arbitrary, the child is currently, now what does currently mean. Does it mean every week, every month, every three months, how many times is this Administrative Consultant going to come in and evaluate the home-education program? And what is the satisfactory standard of education exactly?

In the old Act it also says that the Inspector will issue a certificate that in his opinion, again, the child is being educated at home or elsewhere in a manner equal to the standard of the public schools. And, again, there is no definition of any type of standard that we have been able to find.

**MR. McBRYDE:** Yes, so this bill that we have before us, which is a bill that’s been withdrawn and will be resubmitted to the Legislature in, hopefully, an altered form . . .

**MS FIGUREL:** Hopefully.

**MR. McBRYDE:** . . . is really crucial to the goals of your organization and the goals of you, as parents, because if this Act isn’t worded correctly then you might not be able to do what you want to do.

**MS FIGUREL:** We could use that clause, Clause (b), we could use it, but the use of it can be so arbitrary. You see, we can start a home education program and the administrative consultant for our area can come in — for instance, I live in the Transcona-Springfield School Division, the consultant can come in and evaluate my program and say that he will not approve it because it doesn’t seem to be satisfactory to him. Yet, I can move to another area and the administrative consultant who would be looking into programs in that area would find my program satisfactory. So this leaves a great deal up to the opinion of that individual. Hopefully any administrative consultant coming into that sort of situation would do all that he could to help the parents. We feel, as I’ve mentioned, that co-operating with the goal of children’s education in mind is what should be uppermost in our minds, but this isn’t always the case.

**MR. McBRYDE:** Yes. So, basically, what you would like is a clarification so that it is clear what’s allowed, and then make it less arbitrary by putting in a process where there are other people that could review the program if there is some dispute on the program.

**MS FIGUREL:** Yes.

**MR. McBRYDE:** Okay, that’s good. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, thank you.

**MR. CHAIRMAN:** Mr. Hanuschak, the Member for Burrows.

**MR. HANUSCHAK:** Mr. Chairman, through you to the spokesman for the Manitoba Association for Schooling at Home, in your research have you been able to determine when the concept, the principle of schooling at home had been first recognized and accepted by a Minister of Education in the Province of Manitoba?

**MS FIGUREL:** Well, I imagine just about a hundred years ago.

**MR. HANUSCHAK:** In terms of what? Of legislation or of actual practice?

**MS FIGUREL:** Both. In the original School Act there was mention of education at home and a lot of people, people that you know, I’m sure, took correspondence courses at home because they were too far from a school or were needed to work on the farms, and so they worked for their families and also got their educations at home.

**MR. HANUSCHAK:** But, with reference to obtaining education from a source other than the School of Correspondence.

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**MS FIGURE:** I don't know that there is any. It is my understanding that the original School Act simply said that if the child was receiving an education at home, or elsewhere, the same kind of wording that's in the Clause of the School Act that's in force now was in the original Act and it did not make any reference, in particular, to correspondence courses.

**MR. HANUSCHAK:** Are there any children at the present time complying with the provisions of the current School Attendance Act, as per Section 6(1)(b)?

**MS FIGURE:** Yes there are, yes there are.

**MR. HANUSCHAK:** Have there been any children exempt, or coming under this section? Since when have we had children who . . .

**MS FIGURE:** Well, there have always been children who have been educated at home for reasons of being in remote areas — and they, of course, would be exempted from public school attendance — children who were too ill or were too handicapped to attend regular schools, in recent times there are parents who have chosen this kind of education and they are being educated at home. Some of them are using correspondence courses and some of them are not. There are four to our knowledge who are teaching their children at home because they choose it as an alternative over schools, that do have approval; and there are eight or ten more who do not have approval and are trying to gain approval.

**MR. HANUSCHAK:** Are those the first four or were there some prior to that who were . . . ?

**MS FIGURE:** Yes, there were others but they found that the Department of Education was not very co-operative and they ended up moving out of the province.

**MR. HANUSCHAK:** I have the very distinct recollection of about seven or eight years ago granting approval for this very type of thing . . .

**MS FIGURE:** Oh, yes, there . . .

**MR. HANUSCHAK:** . . . to a family in the vicinity of Killarney, as I recall it.

**MS FIGURE:** Yes, there are families who are exempted, yes, definitely. But it seems that the way the laws are written that individual arbitrary decisions made by the Department of Education at numerous levels make it sort of inconsistent throughout the province of who is exempted and certified and who is not.

**MR. HANUSCHAK:** Thank you.

**MR. CHAIRMAN:** Mr. Boyce.

**MR. BOYCE:** Yes, Mr. Chairman, thank you. Why do we have a public school system?

**MS FIGURE:** The original idea of a public school system, to my understanding, was to allow children who could not pay for private schools, as more wealthy people did a number of years ago, to allow their children to have some education, at least a bare minimum of education.

**MR. BOYCE:** Why do we have private school systems?

**MS FIGURE:** Because there are families and groups who feel that their interests are not served completely by the public school system.

**MR. BOYCE:** What is the aim of education? When we are talking about education, what are we talking about?

**MS FIGURE:** When I talk about education I talk about preparing a child to become a productive independent adult.

**MR. BOYCE:** That's a good definition, and I don't disagree with you, but I'm old fashioned, or whatever you want to call me, I think it's the parental responsibility to educate children, and that

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the rest of these things are but support systems. But, nevertheless, in 1979, after all of the experience that we've had, from the public wheel standpoint, public interest, why is it compulsory for children to attend school?

**MS FIGUREL:** Because the law says it's compulsory.

**MR. BOYCE:** As the Chairman pointed out the other night, we're nothing but folks and we make the law. Why do you think we make the law to be compulsory?

**MS FIGUREL:** Well, I suppose, that you make the law to be compulsory so that children of parents who are not as concerned as the parents in our group will get an education that will hopefully lead them to be productive and independent adults.

**MR. BOYCE:** When you're talking about education we're talking about the basics. But what else takes place in an educational process which apparently overwhelmed all the evidence — I can't even say it, I'm having trouble with words, I've had too long a holiday. All the time from the last Session up until they started talking here a couple of days ago, I listened — but what happens with a youngster — I don't want to be too long on the questions because it will skew your answer, but what happens in an educational process besides the reading, writing and arithmetic type of thing?

**MS FIGUREL:** Well, we could have a very long talk about that also. What happens in the educational process is that the child is involved with a number of and through those experiences he learns how to do particular experiences, tasks, for instance, or how to handle particular situations, how to solve problems for himself, I can go on and on, and he grows.

**MR. BOYCE:** Well, I kind of hoped that you would go on and on and on because I was waiting to hear something which I haven't heard so far and that is to learn to be buffeted about by people.

**MS FIGUREL:** Well, I don't think that that is necessary in a child's education. What I think is, that if we are sincere about wanting the child to learn to handle himself, I think that is what you mean, in a number of different situations, that we will allow him to find out who he is, what kind of a person he is, where he sees himself in the realm of the whole world and if he is strong in those area, has that knowledge about himself, then he won't be buffeted about by people, he will stand his ground and be an individual, and that's certainly what I would hope for my child.

**MR. BOYCE:** Well, when you're talking about buffeting about, you know it came as a distinct shock to me that some people didn't like Irish men, just didn't like Irish men, I couldn't understand it.

**MS FIGUREL:** Did you go to an all Irish school?

**MR. BOYCE:** But nevertheless I wonder, to carry this to perhaps a ludicrous extreme, why don't we educate people in cocoons and just sit them in front of monitors and brainwash them, because you know these techniques are available.

**MS FIGUREL:** I know they are and that's one reason I don't want my child sent to school. I don't want my child sitting in one place, in one isolated area for six hours a day, for twelve years of his life. My child, when he leaves school, has to live in the world that you and I and all these gentlemen are living in today. If he begins living in this world when he's six years old, rather than when he's eighteen, he will much better be able to handle himself. Now, I'm not about to send him off to work, no, but I think there are a lot of valuable experiences that are missed by children who sit in classrooms all the time that they do.

**MR. BOYCE:** Well, Mr. Chairman, the reason I'm asking this question is not to debate them with you but to try and understand them and to understand your position. Because maybe I'm chicken as a parent, I wouldn't accept that onerous responsibility to predict eighteen years hence that my child will be better off, although both my wife and I are teachers, and if we had the time available perhaps we could sit down and develop an educational involvement to take care of even my apprehensions. But nevertheless, in trying to understand — by the way you're the first person I

ever talked to — I've known that the law is extant that you can educate your child at home with the approval of the Minister, or something, I knew that was there, but you're the first person I ever talked to and I don't think that you took this decision lightly.

**MS FIGUREL:** No.

**MR. BOYCE:** I think you took it very very seriously and I respect you for that. But nevertheless, the public has an interest — and this is what we are here about, is the public interest — if the public interest could be protected one way better than another then doubtless we should pursue that better course. Perhaps it is even possible to close down the whole public school system and see what happens to people. But no group of politicians will ever do that.

**MS FIGUREL:** No. I don't think our group would advocate that either.

**MR. BOYCE:** No, I'm not suggesting that you advocate. But from a public interest standpoint, don't you think that the public has the responsibility to its own self-interest to ascertain that as best as humanly possible our youngsters are being prepared to stand on their own two feet, and stand this kind of buffeting which exists in our society at large?

**MS FIGUREL:** If what you are saying is, will the school experience not prepare a child for the school of hard knocks which he's going to get when he gets out of school, I don't really think it does, no. And I can speak to that from my own experience, which is public schools and we have the principal and the superintendent and each teacher who are authorities and there are rules and regulations that have to be followed; and any person who would dare to slightly deviate from these rules and regulations is admonished.

Now that's not how it is in society. Certainly there are rules and regulations but in our places of work and our places of government there is much more freedom allowed for people's individuality and for individual ideas, and so on, than there is allowed in the school system. Therefore, I think that it is an artificial situation that is put forth in the school.

If you would imagine for a moment that you are a class of eight-year old children and I am the big teacher standing in front of you, there is no way that you are going to question me. But you gentlemen as adults and I as an adult standing in front of you, we have a very nice give and take as far as our discussion, but that does not happen in the schoolroom situation because of the authoritarian place that the teachers and other adults have in the school system. So, therefore, those children don't learn to exchange ideas with that adult even though when they get out into the world, as soon as that child graduates from high school he's an adult, but the day before he has to listen to that teacher who is also an adult. That's kind of an artificial situation and I don't think that that goes very far in helping us cope with real-life situations as adults.

**MR. BOYCE:** Well, take for example, your own statement that in dealing with authority, is that not one of the facts of life that we have to learn to cope with?

**MS FIGUREL:** Oh, certainly. I'm here with you dealing with authority, and I feel that I come here on an equal basis with you. But a child in school is not given that impression by the people who have authority over him in the school.

**MR. BOYCE:** Well, may I ask and I don't mean to ask personal questions, nevertheless, are you a survivor of the system as it is? Did you go through the regular school system?

**MS FIGUREL:** I went to regular public schools for twelve years, yes.

**MR. BOYCE:** Well, if I may, Mr. Chairman, the only thing I have to draw on is my own experience and knowledge in this. One of my youngsters, for example, came home, and the attitude of one of her favourite teachers changed when I got elected because apparently his politics are different from mine, and you know, this is just life. . .

**MS FIGUREL:** I understand.

**MR. BOYCE:** . . .you know, and I think as a parent, you say it's a parental responsibility to help educate your children, so my responsibility is that, it is not to go down and punch the teacher in the nose but — he's bigger than me too — but nevertheless, it's to help her understand that life has that kind of buffeting. By the way, don't think I'm trying to argue you out of having provision

in there that . . . even the twelve of you could do what you want, nevertheless, I'm trying to understand it. So this is why I'm asking questions in this way is to gain from your experience. In the public interest, isn't it better for people to learn that kind of buffeting because they can't get that at home, I don't think.

**MS FIGUREL:** Well, we are not going to keep our children locked behind our front doors for twelve years. Our children have not had that experience up to this point. They are out every day dealing with other people. They run into altercations with their friends at the playground, and maybe disappointments because the little boy next door — this happens to my son — he and my son are playing, and a third child comes in and for some reason only two can play together, so one of them is odd man out and when it's my son's turn to be odd man out, he's very disappointed and hurt and he comes in and you know, all solemn and sulky and so on. That kind of situation where unpleasant things happen and we have to adjust to unpleasant things, and happen in every day life situations. They are not exclusive to school rooms. And so I feel that that is really not anything to be seriously concerned about.

**MR. BOYCE:** Well, through you, Mr. Chairman, I want to thank Ms Figurel and perhaps you can share your experience with me as you go down the road. May I ask: are you familiar with "Walden Two", the book "Walden Two"?

**MS FIGUREL:** No, I'm not.

**MR. CHAIRMAN:** Mr. Cosens.

**MR. COSENS:** Ms Figurel, I just wanted one point of clarification. In your brief on page 7, you refer to the Ontario legislation, where it states, and I'm looking at your brief, that "one or more persons who are not employees of the school that the child has the right to attend conduct a hearing and to report to". I take it from your brief that you find that type of situation, or that type of legislation acceptable?

**MS FIGUREL:** That is much more acceptable than what we have in Manitoba at the present time and than anything that's laid out in Bill 22, yes. We like better what we have written as far as "Inquiry Into Home Education Program" which starts on page 6 and finishes on page 7 but that is just an example to sort of perhaps get the Legislature or the committee going into investigating what's going on in other provinces.

**MR. COSENS:** Well then, Ms Figurel, I just had some problem with this, that the Ontario situation doesn't seem that much different to the one that exists in Manitoba. It refers to one or more persons who are not employees of the school. In Manitoba, that is isn't it? the present situation

**MS FIGUREL:** Perhaps I should have included the entire section on that Ontario Act. It states that . . . something similar to what we have started on page 6, "when the parent feels that the child does not have to attend school, or is excused from the attendance of school" and it's the school attendance counsellor in Ontario, when he feels that the child is not excused, then these people are chosen to inquire into it and to report that fact to that inquiry, so there is nothing about any exemption from liability in The Ontario Act as there is in Manitoba, which we feel is a bit overdone.

**MR. COSENS:** Then, Ms Figurel, it's still one of more persons in Ontario who would conduct that inquiry?

**MS FIGUREL:** Yes.

**MR. COSENS:** Just perhaps one more point of clarification. Do I understand you correctly where . . . I get the feeling that you're saying, yes, there are standards and yes, that home education should meet those standards, or are you saying, and I am again looking for clarification, are you saying that the standards that the parent sets should be the acceptable standards?

**MS FIGUREL:** I think that the standards that the parents set, should be carefully considered by the Department of Education or whoever would be making the inquiry, perhaps the local school principal, which we have suggested. I think it should be pointed out that the process in which a child achieves an education, in other words, the amount of time he spends in public school from

Grade One through Twelve presumably, the process that goes on in those twelve years is not quite as important as the result at the end. Now, what we are proposing is, that the public schools use certain methods of instruction through those twelve we're looking for. None of us want to take our children out of school and be negligent parents. If anything, we want to give them a better education than they might be getting in the public schools. Now, we can't tell whether our education by the end of Grade Twelve is going to be better than the public schools, because we don't have two children of equal intelligence and experience, to send one to school and one to keep home and educate. But we feel that superior results can occur in Home Education Programs. It has occurred in other situations and there is no reason why conscientious parents cannot teach their children at home.

**MR. COSENS:** Mr. Chairman, through you to Ms Figurel again. Do I understand you correctly then, that you do accept the idea or the concept that outside people with expertise, experience in the educational system, who are professionals, should be able to judge what is an acceptable standard, even in a home situation?

**MS FIGUREL:** As long as that standard is not made higher than the standard that is going on in the schools. Now, I don't know what the school standard is and nobody has been able to tell our organization what the standard of education is. I would love to have you tell me right here and now, but I don't know that anywhere in any of your regulations that it's defined.

**MR. COSENS:** Well, if we went into that, Mr. Chairman, it would take a little bit of time, but certainly there are levels of skill, competency, levels of ability in reading, in all of those subjects which are considered as core subjects, that are taken as average competency levels in the school system. I would just throw that out as one suggestion if we are talking about standards. I guess my concern, Mr. Chairman, again to Ms Figurel is, I am trying to find out if she really accepts that any one should set the standards for her children's education or whether she as a parent has that sole right.

**MS FIGUREL:** I have the right to determine the manner in which my child is educated. The government has decided to take upon itself, deciding whether at the end of my education of my child that he is properly educated and it seems that they want to check up on me once in a while to see that I'm not neglecting my duties. It is my right to decide the way I do the educating. If I feel that my child is not ready to learn to read until he is eight years old, or if he shows me by his actions that he is not ready to read until he is eight years old, there is no way that I will force him or allow anyone else to force him to read before he is ready, because I feel that forcing a child to do something as important as learning to read could be very detrimental to the rest of the child's education. If he is ready to do arithmetic when he is five, and he wants to do it, then he'll do it.

**MR. COSENS:** I think I have received my answer, Mr. Chairman, thank you.

**MR. CHAIRMAN:** Any further questions? Mr. Walding.

**MR. WALDING:** I was just wondering, Mr. Chairman, I believe as of next year, we insist that all the teachers in the public schools go through some four years of training, after which time we presume that they have learnt some skills in order to do their job. I don't see anything in your brief here about the necessary skills of a parent in doing a similar job to a teacher. Do you believe that there should be some demonstrated skills in the area of teaching?

**MS FIGUREL:** Well, if a parent uses the Manitoba Correspondence Course or another correspondence course, then the parent does not have to do the bulk of the teaching. There are teachers who program and follow the process of the child's learning through the correspondence courses. The Parent then becomes more of a teacher's aide, a helper, in that particular case so therefore the parent would not need a teacher's certificate and a university degree. I think that naturally there should be some sort of inquiry into the competency of the Home Education Program. Now, if upon inquiry into the Home Education Program, a lot of inadequacies are found, then it would be obvious that this parent would not be capable of teaching a child at home. However, I don't think that the sheepskin in the hand necessarily makes a good teacher. Nobody has a patent on teaching and there are a lot of people who have maybe only Grade 10, 11, and 12, who are good teachers; people who can help other people to learn.

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**MR. WALDING:** If I understand properly what you're saying, your Home Education would in fact consist of a supervised correspondence course.

**MS FIGUREL:** It could, or for parents who are teachers themselves, or who have had teacher training, or parents who did a lot of investigating and studying on how education programs are formed, those people could write up their own curriculum and it would be then subject to inquiry by the local school division and possibly by the Department of Education.

**MR. WALDING:** Would you want to see that spelled out then, that in the case of a teacher wishing to teach his or her own child, that that is one thing, where the parent is not a teacher that it should be an approved correspondence course?

**MS FIGUREL:** I don't think that's necessary. I'm leafing through my papers here because I have them mixed up.

**MR. WALDING:** Not necessarily in the Act, it could be a regulation.

**MS FIGUREL:** What I had stated here, and it's probably on the last page I look on, when I spoke about the home education programs and things that would be approved as satisfactory provision for education, it's on Page 5, it would be 4 and 5, the first is about private schools, and on Page 5 it talks about the child receiving a home education. Part 1 of that would be through a correspondence course of some sort. Part 2 would be that the child is involved in a home education program, as defined earlier, and that home education program is defined as meaning an educational process for which the parent or guardian is ultimately responsible. And then in that case, if there was any question, then an inquiry would be made into the home education program, as we had suggested some sort of board of review, with someone from the realm of education, an educational representative, probably a teacher who would be teaching the level that the child would be expected to be in, or thereabouts; someone from our organization who is interested in home education and interested in the fact that home education should have very good standards. It should not be sloppy. We don't want it that way. And also, people from outside, a couple of independent opinions are always appreciated in this sort of thing.

**MR. WALDING:** If I read starting on Page 6, the inquiry into home education program, it says "whether or not the education is satisfactory." The question that arises from that is, satisfactory to whom?

**MS FIGUREL:** Well, that's still very arbitrary, because there's nothing set in the law as to what the standard is, and as Mr. Cosens has said, they do have standards. We have parents who are interested in this sort of thing who cannot get any information written down saying just what those standards are, and so it is arbitrary, yes, but the fact that a child on the 1st of November has learned something since the 1st of October should at least be considered to be some sort of satisfactory situation. He may be not be learning as fast as a child who is attending a public school, but the possibility is that he is probably learning faster because he is getting more individual attention.

**MR. WALDING:** You say there seems to be no definition of satisfactory, but that's under the section of Inquiry into the Program. Now, how can you determine that something is satisfactory when you don't know what is satisfactory or . . .

**MS FIGUREL:** That's really our question, too. It's a word that's used, it's a word that's used now, it's a word that we had to use because there's nothing for us to refer to either. We feel that if a child being taught at home is learning at his own rate, which is individual, then he is receiving satisfactory education at that particular time. The end result can only be really determined, even in the public school, when the child takes the Grade 12 exam.

**MR. WALDING:** It's a little bit late if you haven't been doing a good job.

**MS FIGUREL:** Yes, it is. I guess a lot of students find that out.

**MR. WALDING:** Thank you.

**MR. KOVNATS:** Ms Figurel, a couple of questions. The first one is, is your only intention at this

time to ask us to legislate to allow you to carry on this function of teaching children at school?

**MS FIGUREL:** At home.

**MR. KOVNATS:** At home, I'm sorry.

**MS FIGUREL:** Yes. This is our primary concern, that the clause "at home or elsewhere" has been removed, but second to that is the fact that it's still not very clear as to how we are allowed to educate our children at home, and also the fact that — this applies to parents who send their children to private school as well — we are considered guilty of making our child truant, and only the law then goes on to exempt us. That doesn't really seem fair. We feel that alternatives to public school education need to be put into another category, as providing satisfactory provisions, other than public schools, for the children's educations.

**MR. KOVNAT:** As a taxpayer, would you expect any financial assistance, either from the school board or from the provincial government?

**MS FIGUREL:** No, I would not, because then, if I were to take their money, then they would be able to further dictate to me the manner in which I may go about teaching my child. And I don't care to be in that situation.

**MR. KOVNATS:** Following on that same line, by the same token, there would be no possible way that the Minister could impose a user fee on this type of an operation.

**MS FIGUREL:** Not that I would see.

**MR. KOVNATS:** Thank you.

**MR. CHAIRMAN:** Any further questions? Mr. Boyce.

**MR. BOYCE:** Mr. Chairman, it's more than just an idle curiosity, while Ms Figurel tells us there's only 12 parents involved at the moment, when I had said earlier in asking some questions the statement I used was something like, stick them in front of a TV set and brainwash them. But there's increasing evidence that Ma Bell is only too anxious to do just that. If they start packaging the educational components, almost like TV components, I guess, just shove this circuit in here, do you see a general disenchantment with the public school system to the point where this will become more and more of a demand of parents that they keep their children at home, if they had the tools to teach them at home. Do you see it as a growing problem?

**MS FIGUREL:** I would say that only a small minority of families would choose home education, in spite of the fact that there is already a lot on the television that is specially designed for school classroom use. If anyone subscribes to cable television, they'll know that the public broadcasting system in the United States, Cable 3, puts out programs in the morning that are specifically designed to be shown in classrooms in the schools in North Dakota and Minnesota. Of course they are helpful aids, but you could not turn your child over to the television and expect him to receive satisfactory education that would lead him to a productive adulthood.

**MR. BOYCE:** Mr. Chairman, if Ma Bell puts on an advertising campaign that it's costing us roughly \$2,000 per student year to educate them in a public system, and they come out and they can package this for \$300 per student year . . .

**MS FIGUREL:** Are you saying that the parents would choose to buy that rather than send their child to school? Is that what you're . . . ?

**MR. BOYCE:** I'm asking your opinion of whether this will . . . and I denote my bias when I say increasing problem. I see you as a problem.

**MS FIGUREL:** Yes, I understand that completely.

**MR. BOYCE:** I'm candid about my . . .

**MS FIGUREL:** No, I still don't see that as a threat to the public school system at all. As I said, there are very few families, for a number of reasons, who really would opt for home education. There are many families where it's absolutely necessary for both parents to work and there's no way that they can devote the time to completely educate their child when they have to be away from the home.

**MR. BOYCE:** Completely educate their child. If I may, Mr. Chairman, take a point. In our own local history, I don't know how it's referred to at the moment, but the incident was referred to as the Seven Oaks massacre. I had one of the native people ask me several years after I had studied the Seven Oaks massacre, and he came into the room and he said, what did I think about the Seven Oaks victory? And I didn't even know what he was talking about. So what I'm raising that particular point for is to ask, what responsibility has the parent in teaching a child, at home or anywhere, in dealing with the public expectation relative to the children. In our generation, I was brought up on the Seven Oaks massacre type of thing but now it's shifted away more and more from what they call sexist writing in the books and racist writing and all the rest of it in a textbook. So that we're trying to move away from that.

You certainly don't look like an anarchist to me, but suppose some parents were teaching their children anarchy?

**MS FIGUREL:** Well, I would say that if parents were of the frame of mind of anarchy, that that would be conveyed to the children and the children would probably embrace those ideas even though they went to public school. I would imagine that your children probably very closely embrace your political philosophies and ideals, and that is probably the way it is in most families, that children tend to take on the ideals of their parents, and the fact that a child would be at home a great deal of his time would not make that much difference in that particular case.

**MR. CHAIRMAN:** Mr. Boyce, would you move your microphone up a little closer? The recording equipment is not picking up your voice, sir. Mr. Boyce.

**MR. BOYCE:** You're not missing very much. I'm convinced my children, when they were growing up, were anarchists on their own. When I said earlier that I agree with you that it's a parental responsibility to educate their children, if I may, the differentiation between three words — hypothesis, theory and fact.

**MS FIGUREL:** Pardon? Hypothesis . . .

**MR. BOYCE:** Hypothesis, theory and fact.

**MS FIGUREL:** Yes. All right.

**MR. BOYCE:** It is a fact that all systems move to the expenditure of least energy, and it doesn't make any difference whether it's a chemical system, this is a fact. I would ask you to accept it, and maybe if you don't accept, I'm hoping we could sit down and maybe I can convince you it is a fact. It doesn't matter if it's a physical system, a chemical system or a people system, a family system or anything else of a system. Which means as far as human being beings are concerned, the system of human being-ness is to slough off responsibility.

**MS FIGUREL:** Yes, that's often true. I'll agree.

**MR. BOYCE:** So is it not the problem that something has happened in providing a public educational system where we as parents have expected too much from the system?

**MS FIGUREL:** Yes, that's probably quite true, and I think that's one of the points that I personally would like to speak to. A lot of parents have decided, for one reason or another, a long time ago, that sending the child to public school is the easiest way, and of course it was years ago, when an education cost money from the parents' pocket directly to pay tutors, and a lot of people did not have financial resources, and so the public free schools were welcomed. Today, there are people, myself included, who say that we care and choose not to turn over our responsibility to you. We choose to take that responsibility upon ourselves. We realize that it is a large responsibility.

We also feel that after studying it for a number of years . . . I decided three and one-half years ago that public school was not what I wanted for my child. I have talked and thought at that time

that some alternative school would suit the needs for our child better, but in the last several years my husband and I have come to the conclusion that we are able, we are university educated people, we are able to educate our child at home. Alternative schools produce a great deal of hassle in a lot of respects. The people who were here today about transportation can attest to that very well.

Some schools, alternative schools, are cooperative schools, where parents take turns being involved with the educational process that goes on in the classroom. That takes time that some people don't have, a lot of people have jobs and they can't put that kind of time into, especially fathers cannot put any time in the classroom in that kind of an alternative school.

So it became our conclusion that home-education program was the thing that suited us in particular, and there are a few other families who feel that way also.

**MR. BOYCE:** Well, is it not the case that this is what begs the questions of how we improve the relationship between parental needs and system expectations?

**MS FIGUREL:** Well, I think that there needs to be much more open communication between the parents who feel this way and the Department of Education. I don't think that the people in the Department of Education completely understand our position. And until there is this open communication nothing is going to be resolved in that respect.

**MR. BOYCE:** Well, I perhaps might disagree with you that the Department doesn't understand, I think that they understand, but nevertheless they can only react to political direction, and politicians can only respond to what the public will accept, and in this regard if there is any manifestation of perhaps the disinterest in education — well, I don't know how long you have been here, in the room, but nevertheless there isn't a big huge public outcry, they are not storming the Legislature like they did with Autopac or anything else.

The reasons I am asking these questions, Mr. Chairman, is because the system is being buffeted and is going to be continuing to be buffeted by various forces, one of which is packaged, canned education. I have seen different analyses of how much education takes place in the school, how much takes place in the home, how much takes place in the street, with the expression of various opinions.

Now with the advent of television much of the education which takes place at home is not as a result of interaction with siblings or parents, it is interaction to the boob-tube.

**MS FIGUREL:** Yes, that is true to a certain extent, that is true that there is a lot of learning that goes on from a child watching television. It doesn't mean that all of that learning is good learning. If they are watching television programs which are specifically designed to further their learning, then I say that there is nothing wrong with that. If they are watching it for eight hours a day, I can't say that there is anything right with that, because it still doesn't give them real life experience.

**MR. BOYCE:** Well, how can we as politicians, I am not speaking about the government opposition, but how can we as politicians get to the parents to make them more aware that they have to accept that part of education, which I would think, took place at home?

**MS FIGUREL:** Well, you could do that very easily by letting the parents know; this is something that we sort of feel is going on in a lot of areas, and the school system is only one area. There are a lot of people there who have a lot of education and they put themselves up to parents as being experts, especially to parents who do not have the level of education that these teachers and administrators have.

Now, it is kind of a brainwashing situation to a certain extent in saying that I have this education, I have this degree, therefore because I have this degree I am more knowledgeable to the needs of your child than you are. Now that is not necessarily the case, but this is how many such bodies where there is this kind of a situation promote themselves. The public school system has, in effect, told the parents, don't worry about it, we are the experts, we'll take care of it, and your children are in safe hands, and you needn't worry about it at all. And then when the children come home with problems the parents say, well there must be something wrong with the child because the school is the expert. The parents do not realize that they know an awful lot about that child and the needs of that child and that they should be there to defend those needs.

**MR. BOYCE:** Well, when you say the child comes home with problems, can you expand on that just a little bit.

**MS FIGUREL:** Well, there are lots of problems, problems with not understanding a particular area, whether it's mathematics or language arts or science or whatever. There are problems like that. I can't understand and my teacher — I can't understand the way he explains it to me and I am not doing well and what am I going to do, and that sort of thing. Because this idea has been perpetrated that the school is the expert, parents are very reluctant to take their child's word, and I think that is a very unfortunate situation. There are also problems of, you know, personality problems that arise occasionally between students and teachers, which you probably know about.

**MR. BOYCE:** I even confess to a few, if I got out of bed on the wrong side one morning or something. But some of the problems — difficulties in comprehension at any point in time — we have criticized the system and, you know, when you are somewhat derisive in your remarks about teachers claiming to be professionals, I think they are. . .

**MS FIGUREL:** I think that they are too.

**MR. BOYCE:** If I may just finish. I think they are but the system that we put them in at a certain age and expect them to get out at a certain age, and they are grouped and processed relative to this age group, it has absolutely no relationship whatsoever to learning readiness or anything else. The question that professional teachers are quite aware of, when you said that your child may not be ready to learn to read at eight or five or two or seven or whatever, you are talking about something that is real. But nevertheless, we as a society will not deploy the resources to assist these teachers to help understand thirty children, because to be attuned to every squeak or squawk or whatever in thirty children is most difficult, but there are ways of ascertaining whether Billy or Susan is ready to go from level to the other, and if there is difficulties this can be ascertained and, you know, it can be addressed.

But the fault of the system is not that the teachers are not professional, it is that we, as citizens collectively, will not give them the resources to solve that kind of problem. There may be other problems which we can't solve, such as personality clashes, but don't you think, you know, if we all opt out of the system, I think that society will be worse rather better, so should it not be the case that we should strengthen our resolves as people to allocate the resources to the professional teachers.

**MS FIGUREL:** I think that one of best things we can possible could possibly do is to try very hard to make these kind of resources, that you are talking about, possible for the children in the schools. However, for a lot of parents these resources are not possible at this particular time, therefore, that kind of education, which would be acceptable to many of them, is not available, and from all indications because of a matter of financing such an undertaking will not be available for a long time. Therefore, it may be set into motion this year, for instance, to have many more teacher aides, perhaps smaller classes, fewer pupils within a class, so that the teachers can give more attention to the individual, and that is certainly something that should be aspired to immediately by the educational system. But nevertheless, it is not going to happen overnight and for many of us it will be too late for our children.

**MR. BOYCE:** I respect that point of view. You know, you are probably right from your standpoint, but. . .

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Ms Figurel.

**MR. CHAIRMAN:** The hour is ten o'clock, which we normally adjourn — do you wish to proceed with the questioning or are there more questions for Ms Figurel.

Ms Figurel, we thank you very kindly for your presentation.

**MS FIGUREL:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee.

**MR. CHAIRMAN:** May I remind the Committee that we were supposed to hear Mr. Eliason tonight and unfortunately the hour is ten, do you want to proceed or — we have two delegations coming in the morning at ten o'clock, so I don't know what we can tell Mr. Eliason.

In the meantime, the Clerk has left me a document here, a brief of the Certified General Accountants Association of Manitoba is in his hands and will be circulated in the morning. A letter from Angie Loat of Kenville is in the Clerk's hands and it will be circulated in the morning. Also an extract of a report presented by Magistrate Gyles, the relationship between the Public School

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ystem and the Juvenile Justice System, is in the hands of the Clerk and that will be distributed to the Committee in the morning.

Mr. Eliason, would you like to come tomorrow? What is convenient for you, Sir?

**MR. ELIASON:** Oh yes, I could come almost any time.

**MR. CHAIRMAN:** Well, we have committed to two groups in the morning at ten, so if you would come at 11 o'clock or some place in that hour, we hopefully would maybe get you on before dinner or right after lunch. Would that be okay?

**MR. ELIASON:** That would be fine.

**MR. CHAIRMAN:** Thank you kindly.

Committee rise.

Sorry, Sir.

**MR. JIM GARWOOD:** Mr. Chairman, I wonder if I may be placed — I'm No. 42 on the schedule and I . . .

**MR. CHAIRMAN:** What is convenient for you, Sir?

**MR. GARWOOD:** Could it be possible at eight o'clock tomorrow evening?

**MR. CHAIRMAN:** Tomorrow evening? Very good.

**MR. GARWOOD:** Thank you.

**MR. CHAIRMAN:** 8:00 p.m., Thursday, eh?

Committee rise.



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