

## California Lawmakers Consider How To Regulate Home Schools After Abuse Discovery

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AUDIE CORNISH, HOST:

Home schooling will be getting a closer look in California as lawmakers there go back into session this week. Questions about regulations around home schooling came up earlier in the year after a California couple was charged with abusing their 13 children. Benjamin Purper of member station KVCR has been talking to people on both sides of the debate.

BENJAMIN PURPER, BYLINE: The Grozas are a home-schooled family in Redlands, Calif., about an hour east of Los Angeles. The four kids, ages 6 to 12, do all of their schooling right here with their mom Holly.

HOLLY GROZA: Well, this is the kitchen.

PURPER: This is the kitchen.

GROZA: This is where actually a lot of our home schooling takes place.

PURPER: The children are taught according to a set curriculum. They like to play and socialize.

UNIDENTIFIED CHILD: This is my room.

PURPER: This is your room - OK, very nice.

They do sports in a community too. Just an hour from here, a home-schooled girl escaped her house in January and called 911. Police discovered that she and her dozen siblings had been living in squalid conditions, where they were shackled to beds, tortured and malnourished. That kind of shocking discovery is rare. But it was enough to make California lawmakers consider regulating home schools.

All California parents have to do now to home-school is submit an affidavit with their address. Right now, two bills in the California Assembly could reform home schooling. The first one would collect more data on home-schooled families. The second would create an advisory committee to suggest reforms like inspections and credentialing. But some, like Brian Ray, think that's all wrong.

BRIAN RAY: The idea of trying to come up with more laws to stop more people from doing bad things before we even know they're going to do anything bad is not the concept of the nation that we have under the U.S. Constitution and freedom.

PURPER: Ray has testified in favor of home schooling rights in courtrooms and in front of legislators. He also believes...

RAY: There's no mathematical relationship between how much the government controls home schooling and the amount of abuse.

PURPER: He came to that conclusion by examining a database of nearly 400 home schools that were in the news and courts because children in them were abused. He found no statistical significance between a state's regulation on home schooling and its rate of home school-related child abuse. Theoretically, that means home-schooled children in low-

regulation states, like Arizona, should be about as vulnerable to abuse as children in high-regulation states, like Pennsylvania.

Ray got the data from the Coalition for Responsible Home Education. The Coalition's website lists hundreds of cases of abuse in home schools from media reports and court cases going back to the '80s. But the Coalition says the database is incomplete and warns against using it to argue that regulation doesn't protect home-schooled children.

HANNAH ETTINGER: We would just like to see protections put in place to keep people from falling through the cracks and getting abused.

PURPER: Hannah Ettinger is a volunteer and spokesperson for the Coalition, which is made up of former home-schooled children. I talked to her via Skype. Based on their research and some of their volunteers' experiences, the coalition believes home schooling can keep cases of child abuse unseen by people who have a legal and ethical obligation to report it, like doctors and professional teachers. So they have two policy recommendations - require parents to send their kids to a doctor's checkup and a standardized test each year.

ETTINGER: Both of these encounters would provide children with two interactions with mandatory reporters annually. And so if something is wrong, one of those two encounters should catch it.

PURPER: The Grozas say they already have their kids tested and seen by a doctor every year. So I asked Holly, what if you had to?

GROZA: I don't think we should be required to do that. I don't. We have the freedom to educate our children the way we think is best.

PURPER: The two assembly bills are scheduled to be heard in committee by the end of April. Holly Groza plans to go to Sacramento to testify. For NPR News, I'm Benjamin Purper in Redlands, Calif.