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Ms. Shirl Williams
Director of Student Services
Jackson County School Board
2903 Jefferson St.
Marianna, FL 32446

HSLDA[®]

ADVOCATES FOR HOMESCHOOLING

September 30, 2016

MICHAEL P. DONNELLY, ESQ.
ATTORNEY (MA, NH, WV, DC)

WILLIAM A. ESTRADA, ESQ.
ATTORNEY (CA)

PETER K. KAMAKAWIWOOLE, ESQ.
ATTORNEY (MO, VA)

DANIEL T. BEASLEY, ESQ.
ATTORNEY (CA, WI)

MARY E. SCHOFIELD, ESQ.
OF COUNSEL (CA)

Re: Operation Round Up and Homeschool Families

Dear Ms. Williams:

By way of introduction, the Home School Legal Defense Association is a national organization which has as its primary purpose the protection of the right of parents to educate their children at home. We presently have more than 82,000 member families in all 50 states, including more than 2,600 member families in Florida.

We were recently contacted regarding some comments you made about "Operation Round Up" during a recent televised interview with WJHG News Channel 7 which aired on September 6. As we understand it, "Operation Round Up" is an initiative directed by the Jackson County School Board in which members of the community are encouraged to contact school officials if they suspect a student is truant. In the interview with WJHG you stated the following:

Sometimes if these citizens don't call me, I have no way of knowing. So if it's a nosy neighbor, be a nosy neighbor. Just call me and let me check out the situation...[Homeschoolers] uh, of course, they're not set on any particular schedule, so sometimes the community will see them around town, and they think 'hey, they aren't being educated.' Sometimes the community is right.

WJHFG went on to report that the "school board still encourages people to speak up with their suspicions [about homeschoolers]." See <http://www.wjhg.com/content/news/392511641.html> .

We were hoping that you might be able to clarify what you meant by these comments. We would also appreciate it if you could describe what the policy of the Jackson County School Board is when receiving "Operation Round Up" contacts that involve homeschool families. It would be our desire to better understand your office's handling of homeschool contacts and possibly forward any additional information you wish to provide to our members and other homeschooling families in the region to alleviate the concerns we have heard that have been raised by your statements.

H O M E S C H O O L L E G A L D E F E N S E A S S O C I A T I O N

NATIONAL OFFICE ■ ONE PATRICK HENRY CIRCLE ■ PURCELLVILLE, VA 20132 ■ 540-338-5600 ■ 540-338-1952 FAX
CAPITOL HILL OFFICE ■ 119 C STREET, S.E. ■ WASHINGTON, DC 20003

HSLDA certainly agrees that truancy is a problem that needs to be addressed. It is unfortunate that, based upon the news report, it appears to be a growing problem in Jackson County. What concerns our members about your statements is that as homeschooling families their children do not get on a school bus to head off to school. Instead they sit down at their kitchen table and pull out their books to receive instruction from their parent(s). Occasionally, this prompts questions from neighbors and the general public who see these homeschooled children out during normal school hours. Your statements implied that local individuals need to report any child who they see in public during school hours. Even more troubling is that your statements suggest that everyone should report children they *think* aren't being educated. In our opinion, this is a threatening practice, and will instill a spirit of suspicion and hostility against homeschoolers in the community.

Besides the concern about your statements during the interview with WJHFG, we are very interested in knowing what the policy of the Jackson County School Board is when coming into contact with homeschooling families. We would appreciate knowing whether local truancy officials understand Florida law when it comes to homeschooling and who is responsible for their training in this area. We would like the opportunity to be able to provide Jackson County and specifically all those involved with "Operation Round Up" with some material that might be helpful when school district officials come into contact with homeschooling families.

Thank you for your time and for your prompt attention to this matter. We look forward to hearing from your office. I can be reached at 540-338-5600.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "TJ Schmidt". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Thomas J. Schmidt

Cc: Mr. Steve Benton, Sr., Superintendent of Jackson County Schools
Member families in Jackson County