

Missouri public schools must let homeschooled students try out for activities starting late August

Gov. Mike Kehoe signed [Senate Bill 63](#) into law on Wednesday. The bill will require all Missouri public schools to allow homeschooled students in the area to try out for sports teams and other activities, beginning Aug. 28.

This change has long been in the works, as similar legislation has been filed for the past 10 years. The bills tended to face opposition in the Missouri House of Representatives, but the legislation this year had a strong backing from the House majority floor leader, who was homeschooled himself.

The law previously said that any school district in Missouri could choose if it wanted to allow homeschooled students to participate in its school activities. If they opted in, students would have to take at least two classes at the high school to qualify.

The new bill requires all school districts to allow homeschooled athletes to try out and will not require students to take two classes. The bill was sponsored by Sen. Ben Brown, R-Washington, who helped pave the way for its passage.

"He's a tireless advocate for it, it wouldn't have passed without his work. He would not stop meeting with people and figuring out how to overcome all of the roadblocks along the way," said Zeke Spieker, a former homeschooled student who never got to play on high school

sports teams.

His family has been working on this bill since the beginning.

"We dove into the political process, and we learned all about it," Spiker said. "How to work a bill, how a bill is passed. And each year, we saw continuous progress, but it was still a far cry from passing. And so this year in particular, we hit a breakthrough."

Spiker said when his family first began working on the bill, they struggled to just get a hearing. The bill had often hit roadblocks while going through the House, but it was able to clear those this year.

Although Spiker is unable to play high school sports anymore, he said his family continues to fight for the bill to pave the way for other homeschooled athletes.

One of those athletes is Addie Scull, a softball player from Moberly. Her family chose homeschooling largely because of their family business, Show-Me Reindeer, LLC. The family brings its 22 reindeer to holiday events across Missouri and neighboring states.

"All of December is completely booked out. November, about halfway of that, is also booked out," Scull said. "So, I could have played for the school, but they would have required for people to take two school classes, and with us doing that (Show-Me Reindeer), I could not do that. There was no possible way."

Now, Scull will finally be able to try out for a high school team, which she said will bring her new opportunities.

"I think it's going to offer me more opportunities to play," Scull said. "It's

going to make me a better player. It's going to expose me to more people, more places, more of the sport."

Those who opposed the bill often used the claim that homeschooled athletes should create their own teams to play on. However, Spieker said this is unattainable in many parts of Missouri.

"In most of these rural areas, the population base can't support a homeschool team, much less a competitive homeschool team," Spieker said.

The Missouri State High School Activities Association released a statement after the bill passed in the House in May. MSHSAA said it was working toward making guidelines for school districts to follow. The statement also said MSHSAA will be "working with the Missouri School Boards' Association to provide guidance to school districts on policy modifications, and materials will be provided to the membership to assist in local education efforts."

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