



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on January 19, 2012

## Home School Families in Sweden Brace for New Government Assault

A liberal Swedish politician has sent a shot over the bow of that country's home school community. Writing in a Swedish newspaper, with a follow-up posting on her blog, Lotta Edholm (left) of Sweden's Liberal Party called for changes to the country's laws that would allow government social workers to more easily take children away from home school families.



Declared Edholm: "Today I write with Ann-Katrin Aslund on [Aftonbladet's](#) debate page that the social services law should be amended so that social services are able to intervene when children are kept away from school by their parents — often for religious or ideological reasons."

The Alliance Defense Fund (ADF), a U.S.-based conservative legal advocacy group, noted that Edholm's recommendation comes at a time when home school families in Sweden are under severe assault. The ADF, in partnership with another U.S. group, the [Home School Legal Defense Association](#) (HSLDA), has come to the legal aid of a Swedish home school family whose nine-year-old son was abducted by the Swedish government in 2009. According to an ADF press release, Swedish officials "seized the child because they believe home schooling is an inappropriate way to raise a child and insist the government should raise [him] instead, even though home-schooling was legal in Sweden at the time he was taken into custody." After Swedish courts sided with the government in its seizure of the boy, ADF and HSLDA attorneys [asked the European Court of Human Rights](#) to hear the case, explaining that Swedish authorities would not allow the family to be represented in Sweden's courts by the foreign attorneys.

HSLDA's Mike Donnelly said that "Sweden's educational policy is becoming increasingly totalitarian," adding that "a country that does not permit home education is not really a free country."

The home school advocacy group noted that the Swedish government has been cracking down on home school families for many years. "In 2010 the Swedish Parliament changed its basic education law, making it virtually impossible to obtain permission to home school," the group reported in an update on the state of home schooling in the country. "The previously enacted 1985 school law had allowed parents to apply for permission from local authorities, where permission was mostly granted. However, the changes made by the Swedish Parliament now require 'exceptional circumstances' and also make it possible for parents to be criminally prosecuted if they don't send their children to school — something that was not possible under the previous law."

For the last two years virtually no family in Sweden has been given permission to home school, explained Jonas Himmelstrand, president of the Swedish Association for Home Education.



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Himmelstrand knows personally the hardship of trying to educate children at home in a country that is trying to criminalize the practice. He and his wife have been in court for years over their family home school program, and the government has fined them at least \$26,000 — an impossible sum for an average Swedish family.

Himmelstrand said that Edholm's intransigent attitude toward home school families is representative of most government bureaucrats in Sweden. "Edholm argues that because children have a right to an education, this means that public school is the only valid option," he explained to the HSLDA. But in light of the academic success most home school families — in Sweden and around the world — are having, such an attitude "is pure ignorance," he said. "Home education is an effective and perfectly legitimate way for children to learn. Edholm's argument is totalitarian and breaches fundamental democratic principles. It's fine for the government to provide schools, but it goes against basic human rights norms to force every child to go to school."

The problem, however, is that "in Sweden the line between parents and the state has become strongly blurred," he said, adding that "many countries have education systems — such as England, Canada, the United States, and our Nordic neighbors — which show that democracies can and must make room for home education."

ADF's European legal adviser, Roger Kiska, said that parents everywhere — including in Sweden — have the right to do what is best for their children without the worry of government intrusion. "Swedish policy on home education is at odds with recognized international legal standards that uphold the right of parents to direct the education of their children," he said.

HSLDA's Mike Donnelly pointed out that "the right of parents to choose the kind of education their children receive is a fundamental human right recognized in international legal documents.... Somehow Swedish politicians have lost their way and are ignoring these basic human rights. Sweden has joined Germany in repressing educational freedom. It's important that free people stand up to governments who persecute their own people."

HSDLA noted that scores of home school families have fled Germany as that country's officials "have sought crushing fines, jail sentences, and have even sought to remove children from otherwise functional families just because of home education." Germany's highest courts have sanctioned such action, arguing that home schooling encourages the creation of "parallel societies."

Donnelly said that it is important for home school proponents in America to pay attention to what is happening elsewhere because such trends could be pushed by education "experts" in this nation. He noted at least one professor who is forwarding such ideology.

"In her book *What Is Right for Children*, Emory University School of Law Professor Martha Albertson-Fineman makes the argument that it is not enough that children have the opportunity to go to public school — they must all go to public school, meaning that home schooling and private schools should be banned," Donnelly wrote recently.

He argued that such thinking "is one of the reasons why it is important for American home schoolers to be interested in what happens overseas. By fighting these ideas wherever they occur globally, we can prevent them from gaining traction here."



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