

Bill that would prohibit protesting outside private homes advances

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SALT LAKE CITY — A bill prohibiting the picketing of residential homes advanced unanimously from committee Tuesday with a favorable recommendation.

Last fall, anti-mask protesters picketed outside the private home of state epidemiologist Dr. Angela Dunn.

“It’s scary and wrong that somebody would feel comfortable sharing my personal information,” Dr. Dunn said at a press conference after the demonstration. “It’s taken a really big toll on my family and myself.”

Former Governor Gary Herbert’s private home in Orem, also targeted, by people upset with COVID-19 restrictions. Then Lt. Governor Spencer Cox tweeted that he met demonstrators with hot chocolate and treats.

Rep. Ryan Wilcox believes families should not have to bear the burden if picketers are upset by a parent’s actions at work.

“My first concern is not for the officials who were involved in that but for their families, for their children, for their spouse,” said Rep. Ryan Wilcox (R), Ogden.

While Orem and Salt Lake City prohibited at-home demonstrations at the time, Rep. Ryan Wilcox wants to make it illegal to do so statewide with House Bill 291.

“It’s important that we realize that there is a difference between petitioning the government or an official, and harassing a family,” Rep. Wilcox said.

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Wilcox’s bill would punish home demonstrations targeting a resident with a Class B misdemeanor, which can be up to six months in jail or a \$1,000 fine.

“It really does encroach on our right for a redress of grievances. I totally respect that people need to feel peace and safety in their home, but as an elected official there are things that are not necessarily convenient,” said Shayla Shumaker, who admits to protesting at a private home.

While the ACLU of Utah believes such restrictions have been upheld by the US Supreme Court, legal director John Mejia told FOX13, “We believe Utah lawmakers should always consider penalties that do not involve jail time.”

The bill does not outlaw picketing in neighborhoods, as long as it doesn't target a specific home, but rather moves past several homes on public property.