

As a parent of two children who attend Chagrin Valley School at Kelly's Working Well Farm, I feel compelled to respond to Fire Chief Lovell's statement in the 11/14 article ("Bainbridge Township shuts down school at Working Well Farm"). Lovell states: "We have no choice but to represent the best interests and safety of the occupants." As an "occupant" and mother of "occupants", I respectfully disagree that Fire Chief Lovell's place is to speak for me, and ask that he not assume that he knows or can decide what the "best interests" of myself or my family are.

I appreciate the sentiment that safety is a priority. Of course I want my children to be in a safe environment, and it is my judgement that on the whole Kelly's Working Well Farm fits that description. Is it a sterile, controlled environment in which all aspects are regulated? No. Which is exactly why my family and I have made the choice to support and be a part of the community that has formed around Kelly's Working Well Farm. The farm is an environment that we feel very comfortable and excited about having our children engaged in. It is one that fosters exploration, creativity, thinking outside of the box and a genuine sense of connection to nature which is sorely lacking in too much of our daily lives. All of these qualities serve to empower my sons and all the children and adults who have the opportunity to participate in programs in this unique and vital space.

I would also question the Fire Department's seemingly urgent concern for the safety issues that they have found. Kelly Clark, from the very first time a representative from the Fire Department visited the farm, has tried to get information on what specific safety issues need to be addressed and how best to go about that work. However, the Fire Department refused to provide such a list. Instead, demands without guidance have been made, and bullying tactics have been used, such as officials showing up in full force while children were going about their learning at the farm, forcing them to be placed in first ambulances and then a school bus while officials executed an administrative search via a warrant.

I would ask that the Fire and Zoning Departments show a greater willingness to work with Kelly's Working Well Farm in a collaborative way to help Kelly and the community who support the farm to continue in this unique and very needed venture by offering concrete, timely and relevant guidance on safety improvements that can be made without demanding that the farm and its educational programs become something they are not.

Respectfully,
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