



Caribou Community School

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TO: Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs
FROM: Dr. Leland Caron - Principal - Caribou Community School - RSU39
RE: In Support of LD 165: An Act to Allow School Boards to Expel or Suspend Students Regardless of Grade Level
DATE: March 13, 2025

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. My name is Dr. Leland Caron, and I am the principal of Caribou Community School, a PreK to grade 8 school in Aroostook County.

I along with many of my school administrative colleagues across not only my County of Aroostook but across the State of Maine support the passage of LD 165.

During the 130th Legislature, the authority of building administrators to send students home for behavioral issues was removed. As a Maine principal, the decision to temporarily send a child home is not taken lightly and is used as a last resort, however; this last resort is an essential option for their well-being and the safety of other students and staff in our learning environment. When dangerous behaviors occur, it impacts not only the individual student involved but also the broader school community. While I fully recognize the importance of providing students with the support and resources they need to address behavioral challenges, there are situations where sending a student home is a needed option for several key reasons:

- **Immediate Safety:** In instances of violent or disruptive behavior, allowing the student to remain on campus can escalate the situation, putting other students, staff, and even the student themselves at risk. Temporarily sending a student home allows time for the situation to de-escalate and prevent further harm.
- **Student Well-Being:** For students engaging in dangerous behavior, it may be a sign of underlying stress, trauma, or personal issues that need to be addressed. By temporarily removing them from the immediate environment, we can allow them to calm down and reflect, as well as provide time for more focused intervention and support.
- **Preserving the Learning Environment:** Schools must remain safe and conducive to learning for all students. Disruptive or dangerous behavior creates an environment where other students feel unsafe, which undermines their ability to focus and learn. Temporarily sending the student home allows the rest of the school community to continue without fear or distraction.

At Caribou Community School, on multiple occasions, we have had younger students cause significant damage to our classrooms while their peers watched in horror. (See classroom photos at end of testimony) Cupboard doors ripped off the hinges, student belongings tossed about, and chairs and tables turned over.

Teachers work frantically to remove the other students to safety while trying their best to de-escalate the student in crisis. Students in the classroom were not physically hurt, but many were extremely emotional and voiced their concerns and worries that the student would destroy their classroom again. In this situation, everyone needs a break. The children in the classroom will need time to process what happened, the student in crisis needs time away from the classroom, the staff needs to clean up the mess and work through their own emotions experienced during the event, and the school needs time to create a plan designed to prevent a reoccurrence of the behavior while keeping everyone safe. I believe reinstating the authority to temporarily suspend students 5 grade and lower will help reduce similar events that I described and alleviate the high anxiety experienced by the other students and staff in the classroom.

I urge the Legislature to restore the authority that administrators once had to effectively and safely manage our schools. The ability to suspend students in fifth grade and below should be a last resort option as school teams work to prioritize the well-being of our students and staff in our learning environment.

For these reasons, I, along with my administrative colleagues urge the Committee to vote **Ought to Pass** on LD 165.

