

Good Afternoon, Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and members of the Educational and Cultural Affairs committee. My name is April Noble, and I serve as the principal of CK Burns, an elementary school in Saco. I appreciate the opportunity to testify in support of Legislative Document No. 165, which seeks to grant school administrators the authority to suspend students in elementary school when aggressive or dangerous behavior occurs, ensuring a safe learning environment for all while a reentry plan is developed.

Every day, educators and school leaders are entrusted with the safety and well-being of our students and staff. While we are committed to supporting the needs of all children, including those with behavioral challenges, we also have a duty to ensure that classrooms remain safe and conducive to learning. Under current law, our ability to remove students in grades 5 and below is severely limited, even in cases where a child has exhibited violent or dangerous behaviors that pose an immediate threat to others.

This reality creates an untenable situation for teachers, students, and school officials. In recent years, we have seen an increase in incidents where young students engage in aggressive behaviors, including physical assaults on peers and staff, destruction of property, and violent outbursts that disrupt the entire school community. When these students are allowed to remain in the building without appropriate intervention, it not only compromises the safety of others but also hinders the learning of all students.

Consider these examples from Maine elementary schools:

- A student writes a death threat note and lists multiple names on it of classmates.
- A student running around the school and making gun motions and noises at administrators and teachers while in the classroom in front of an entire group of classmates
- A student demonstrating sexual acts and using sexualized statements with a statue at the school on the playground while other students are present
- A student sitting on a rolling chair rolling up and down hallways trying to run into students
- A student in hallways outside of classrooms screaming, swearing, threatening and attempting to hit staff while classes are in session

Without the ability to remove a student for even a short period to de-escalate the situation, follow protocols and complete necessary investigations while also creating a thoughtful plan for reintegration, we are left with few options. Teachers must divert their attention from instruction to crisis management. Support staff are stretched thin, often pulled from other critical duties to supervise students in crisis. Other children in the classroom experience trauma and anxiety, disrupting their educational experience.

This bill does not advocate for punitive discipline but rather acknowledges the practical necessity of temporary removal when a child's behavior presents an imminent danger. A structured suspension allows school teams to develop individualized support plans, engage families, and connect students with necessary services before they return to the school environment.

We all share the goal of fostering inclusive, supportive schools where every student can thrive. However, ensuring the safety of all students and staff must remain a top priority. I urge you to support this legislation to give school leaders the necessary tools to address dangerous behaviors effectively while continuing to provide appropriate interventions for students in need.