



# *Harrington Elementary School*

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**TO: Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs**

**FROM: Eric Brooks - Principal – Harrington Elementary School – RSU/MSAD #37**

**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 Eric Brooks, and I am the principal of Harrington Elementary School, a PreK to grade 6 school in Washington County.

School should be a safe, nurturing space for learning where students have the opportunity to thrive and succeed. However, most recently, we have seen an alarming rise in violent and threatening behaviors. These behaviors have a big impact on the entire school community and overall student and staff well-being as the emotional and psychological toll can be overwhelming after being exposed to these explosive and dangerous behaviors. We have had fist fights, students threatening to kill others, a student making a replica of a gun and pointing it at others, students flipping tables and destroying classrooms, students throwing things, kicking, biting, and much more. During these times, staff work hard to protect other students and have to evacuate classrooms, which essentially holds the learning space hostage, displacing other students who want to learn. It often takes several staff members to respond to these explosive and violent behaviors and with a small staff, it takes teachers and staff out of key areas and deprives other students of the learning experiences and services they deserve.

Suspension should be used sparingly and only when absolutely necessary. In small, rural schools, addressing violent and threatening behaviors is particularly challenging. My school faces severe resource constraints. We currently do not have a guidance counselor, social worker, school resource officer, or other mental health supports, which we so desperately need.

Being able to suspend students shows that there are consequences for these inappropriate behaviors and allows teachers and staff to debrief and create a plan for moving forward to address student needs. Additionally, it allows other students to see that these inappropriate behaviors are being taken seriously and allows them some refuge from the student who was explosive. Temporary suspension also allows the student who had these inappropriate behaviors time to deescalate.

I strongly urge the Committee to vote **Ought to Pass** on LD 165 as principals and schools work to keep schools safe.