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LD 165

I have worked in public education in Maine for the past 19 years as both a classroom teacher and have currently served as the assistant principal in my district for the past 10 years. I am unable to testify in person given the demands of my daily schedule but I wanted to give some perspective and context around suspension and expulsion in public schools as I am a huge supporter of LD 165 - An Act to Allow School Boards to Expel or Suspend Students Regardless of Grade Level.

I will start by saying the words “suspension” and “expulsion” are strong words. As an administrator and parent myself, I provide many therapeutic interventions for students and positive behavior support plans. We have a wraparound approach when it comes to working with challenging students which involves all stakeholders including administrators, teachers, social workers, outreach, counselors, parents, resource officers, coaches, support staff and students. That being said, we do not take suspending a student lightly. We understand the impact that this has on the student and the families and we only use it when we are seeing significant and/or unmanageable behaviors. These infractions may involve access to weapons, school violence, aggressive behavior, substance use, bullying, and extreme insubordination/disruption.

Since 2020, we have seen a significant increase in these behaviors in not just the middle and upper grades but also at the elementary level in grades 5 and below. Under current legislation, students in grades 5 and below cannot be suspended unless it reaches a threshold of “severe bodily harm”. While we want to keep students in school as much as possible, at times it is necessary to remove students from school for the peace and usefulness of the rest of the student body.

Lastly, I will say that when a student (in any grade is suspended in my experience) it is done with a therapeutic approach. In conjunction with suspension, it includes a parent/student conference, counseling support, support and transition programming, outreach work as needed, developing/amending existing support plans, and reflective learning. This has been and will continue to be our approach moving forward. However, it is imperative that this bill move forward for those unique circumstances that arise from time to time in the lower grades. In these situations, we are seeing middle and high school type behaviors from elementary age students. Thank you for time and consideration.