

Testimony in Opposition to LD 165

Dear Senator Rafferty, Representative, and esteemed members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee:

My name is Victoria Morales and I served my community of South Portland in the 130th and 131st Legislature. I was also the sponsor of the 5th grade and under out-of-school suspension policy that is before you today for repeal. I regret that I cannot attend the hearing in Augusta today due to work obligations, but I would like to share my perspective on LD 165.

This Committee dedicated two sessions to this policy, meticulously refining it before its passage. A key focus was the concerning suspension data for children aged 11, which revealed that Maine elementary schools issued nearly **800 out-of-school suspensions for children aged 3-11 during the 2018-2019 school year**.

This policy was enacted in response to such data, as well as compelling testimony from children and families affected by suspensions for non-safety-related behavioral issues. These individuals highlighted the educational harm caused when young learners are removed from school, sending the message that they do not belong. Many emphasized the need for individualized education plans and special education services to address medical and behavioral needs, rather than punitive measures like suspension.

I urge the Committee to review the recent legislative history for this policy and oppose LD 165.

Thank you for your incredible service to the people of Maine.

Victoria Morales
South Portland Resident