

Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs Chairperson Senator Joseph Rafferty, Representative Murphy Public Hearing on LD 165:
An Act to Allow School Boards to Expel or Suspend Students Regardless of Grade Level.

Good Afternoon Chairpersons Rafferty, Representative Murphy and esteemed members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, My name is Tucker Goddu I am 16 years old and I live in Cumberland. I do not support LD 165.

Let me tell you a little bit about why that is.

4 years ago I came before the committee on Education and Cultural Affairs to explain why it was important to NOT suspend elementary school students. Here's a quick snapshot of my journey.

I'm the kind of kid that you don't know something is different about me at first glance. My illness is not obvious. However, before doctors were able to diagnose me correctly, I had a really hard time with school. I couldn't stay in my clear and present brain for long periods of time and I was often asked to leave the classroom when I was younger. Recess was taken away from me as punishment. I was often isolated from others. I already felt badly about myself. This was so stressful. Not only did I feel so different than everyone, I couldn't learn.

I didn't feel safe at school. I didn't trust anyone at school. I was 7.

Long story short, I'm fortunate. I went to a lot of doctors, got a diagnosis, had years of treatments and medicines, some to even retain my brain to trust adults in school again.

I share this because I'm lucky in some ways. If my mom didn't know to get me to doctors, what would my schooling have looked like? I would have been labeled a

problem kid. Did you know that labels such as “Problem kids” is one of the first steps to begin a child into the school to prison pipeline?

Many professionals and studies show that expelling and suspending children can hurt their development and keep them from reaching their potential. It makes them feel excluded, and unwanted. Often it happens to children who have disabilities or other inequities such as race. These students are mislabeled and shouldn't be sent home. What if their home is unsafe? What message is that kid going to hear? They'll hear that the school doesn't care about them and then they may think, “why try?” This is what the school to prison pipeline looks like in the impressionable years. Instead, lawmakers have the opportunity to continue to work to dismantle this pipeline in Maine. Children should be helped, supported and believed in.

I also want to point out that it isn't just the troubled kids who will benefit. It's ALL of our students. Students who are deemed “good kids” are also at risk for having chronic stress around not having all their classmates, or wondering if they will be next to get in trouble. How can you think and learn if you're constantly having the threat of being punished hanging over your head?

I can answer that- you can't.

I ask you today to take action that shows you support ALL Maine students. 4 years ago I testified that we want to grow up in a society that shows adults really care about our children. You have the opportunity to show us that you do, LD 165 does NOT do that. Thank you for your time.

Tucker Goddu
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