

March 13, 2025

Maine PRISONER ADVOCACY Coalition



Greetings Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy and Honorable members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee.

My name is Jan Collins. I am assistant director of Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition, an organization committed to ethical, positive, and humane changes in Maine's prison system, I taught 25 years of High School science and one year of special education, and I am a past president of Franklin County Retired Educators. I am here to oppose **LD 165 An Act to Allow School Boards to Expel or Suspend Students Regardless of Grade Level.**

In my twenty-six years of classroom teaching I experienced more than my share of disciplinary issues, including at one point an assault. Like most teachers I was frustrated by a system that allowed few options and returned the student to the classroom with no new skills for coping with their frustration and more work for me and the student.

But, out of school suspension is a recipe for disaster. It means the student inevitably falls behind, is both lost and swamped by make-up work, and often frustrated and hopeless. It is a set-up for failure. Frequently, the student simply drops out of school. As a high school teacher, I saw the direct result of school suspension and expulsion policies.

In school suspensions were a little bit better. At least I could go to the suspension room during my prep period with assignments and directions, but I could not bring labs. Even then, the student was not receiving the skills to deal with the underlying issues that caused them to act out..

Suspensions and expulsions simply kick the can down the road without dealing with the underlying issues. It magnifies problems instead of solving them. When a child acts

out in school, no matter what the age, it is a plea for help. It may be inarticulate, and poorly delivered, but it is still a plea.

Suspensions lead to depression and suicidal ideation, they target the disadvantaged, and they increase the chances that someone will end up in prison all of which are much more resource intensive and costly consequences.

Research indicates a strong connection between school suspensions and negative mental health outcomes, including increased rates of depression and suicidal ideation, particularly among students experiencing unfair discipline.¹

Boys, economically disadvantaged young people and Black, Latino and Native American students more often receive suspensions and expulsions.²

In addition, if a youth is suspended even once they have an 878% greater logged odds of experiencing an incarceration than youth who were never suspended.³

School districts must develop a positive discipline policies that creates healing, not hurt.

Developing restorative/positive disciplinary practices helps teachers as much as it helps students. Teachers benefit when students learn positive behaviors instead of simply receiving punishment.

Please oppose LD 165 An Act to Allow School Boards to Expel or Suspend Students Regardless of Grade Level.

Thank-you for your support.

Sincerely,
Jan M. Collins
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¹ Angton, Alexia. Niño, Michael. School Suspensions and Expulsions Can Lead to a Lifetime of Depression. university of Arkansas News. Nov 8, 2024. <https://news.uark.edu/articles/72805/school-suspensions-and-expulsions-can-lead-to-a-lifetime-of-depression#:~:text=Boys%2C%20economically%20disadvantaged%20young%20people,physical%20and%20mental%20health%20outcomes.>

² Ibid.

³ Hemez P, Brent JJ, Mowen TJ. Exploring the School-to-Prison Pipeline: How School Suspensions Influence Incarceration During Young Adulthood. *Youth Violence Juv Justice*. 2020 Jul;18(3):235-255. doi: 10.1177/1541204019880945. Epub 2019 Oct 31. PMID: 34262407; PMCID: PMC8277150.