

POSITION STATEMENT IN OPPOSITION**LD 165, An Act to Allow School Boards to Expel or Suspend Students Regardless of Grade Level****Presented to Maine's Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs**

As the state's largest grassroots mental health advocacy organization, NAMI Maine strongly opposes the passage of *LD 165: An Act to Allow School Boards to Expel or Suspend Students Regardless of Grade Level*. Exclusionary discipline within the educational setting has been found to impact on specific populations of students disproportionately. This includes students who experience familial poverty, other than non-Hispanic white youth, non-binary gender, special education participation, or multiple Adverse childhood experiences.¹

The American Academy of Pediatrics maintains that expulsion or suspension out of school is counterproductive to intended goals of maintaining a safe community setting, as it has been found to increase the risks to youth.² Utilizing exclusionary discipline for our young people sends a dismissive message to our most vulnerable youth. By ignoring the copious amounts of research regarding the detrimental impacts on individual youths, families, schools, and communities, we are setting a trajectory for negative long-term health and economic outcomes for a group of incredibly young and vulnerable individuals.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) Study found that childhood abuse, household dysfunction, and neglect were identified as significant risk factors in many chronic medical conditions and early death in adulthood, as well as significant risk factors for youth, including difficulties in the school setting. It is also found that youth with higher ACE scores are more likely to suffer from higher rates of substance use disorders, self-harm, disruptive behaviors, and school-related issues. In elementary-aged children, there is a strong relationship between the dose-response effect between the number of ACEs and the risk of poor school attendance, behavioral problems, and failure to meet grade-level standards in mathematics, reading, or writing.³ The impact of childhood trauma has been significantly studied since the ACEs research was initially released, and it has been found that by providing trauma-informed, resiliency-based interventions and supports, the lasting impacts of these experiences are decreased. Sadly, many initiatives that have been initiated to address the effects of ACE scores have not been implemented, along with cuts to the support and resources that have been utilized to support the resilience and social and emotional well-being of our most vulnerable students.

Research has outlined that instead of reacting with exclusionary discipline, responding with increased protective factors, and addressing underlying causes such as mental health challenges, ACEs, social and

¹ *Exclusionary Discipline Threatens Youth Mental Health, but Protective Factors Can Help*. (2024). PRB.
<https://www.prb.org/articles/exclusionary-discipline-threatens-youth-mental-health-but-protective-factors-can-help/>

² American Academy of Pediatrics Council on School Health, "[Out-of-School Suspension and Expulsion](#)," *Pediatrics* 131, no. 3 (2013): e1000–7.

³ Blodgett, C., & Lanigan, J. D. (2018). The association between adverse childhood experience (ACE) and school success in elementary school children. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 33(1), 137–146. <https://doi.org/10.1037/spq0000256>

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emotional skills, and improved coping skills, communities increase long-term outcomes. This includes decreased medical costs and burdens and decreased rates of utilization of higher levels of care, such as inpatient hospitalizations and incarcerations. The State of Maine has recently entered a settlement agreement with the Department of Justice regarding the high levels of youth with behavioral challenges placed in institutions due to the lack of community resources. Our educational system correlates with the prison and criminal justice system later in life.⁴ The State of Maine cannot afford additional complications regarding supporting our youth in remaining in their communities with protective and resilient factors.

NAMI Maine appreciates that the behavioral health needs of young people are a difficult and complex issue to address. However, investment in this high-risk population to ensure they can receive evidence-based supportive treatment will reduce the long-term financial impacts on the state. Investing in supportive resources and support is a far more proactive and forward-thinking approach. Because of this, NAMI Maine urges that this committee vote ought not to pass.

ABOUT NAMI MAINE: *Incorporated in 1984, the National Alliance on Mental Illness, Maine Chapter (NAMI Maine) is the state's largest grassroots mental health organization. With support from national and regional affiliates, the agency is dedicated to building better lives for everyone impacted by behavioral health concerns. NAMI Maine engages with leaders and community partners at all levels to improve the state's mental health system through collaboration and education.*

⁴ Administrator. (2024, February 7). *The School-to-Prison Pipeline - Criminal Justice - iResearchNet*. Criminal Justice. <https://criminal-justice.iresearchnet.com/criminal-justice-process/racial-and-socioeconomic-disparities/the-school-to-prison-pipeline/>

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