

Alberto Morales
South Portland
LD 165

Subject: Urgent Concern Regarding Proposed Changes to LD 165 - Suspension of Elementary Students

To whom it may concern,

As a current administrator in Maine's educational system with over 25 years of experience as an educator, I am writing to express my profound concern regarding the proposed changes to LD 165, which would make it easier to suspend preschool through 5th-grade students.

The existing protections afforded by LD 165 are crucial for maintaining a stable and supportive learning environment for our youngest students. Repealing or weakening these protections would have significant negative consequences, including:

Increased Disciplinary Exclusion: Easier suspensions will disproportionately affect vulnerable student populations, including those with disabilities, students of color, and those from low-income families. This will exacerbate existing inequities and further marginalize these students.

Suspensions, especially at the elementary level, disrupt the critical developmental and academic progress of young children. This can lead to long-term academic setbacks and increased risks of future behavioral issues.

A focus on suspension often neglects the underlying causes of student behavior. Effective discipline strategies should prioritize proactive interventions, such as social-emotional learning, restorative practices, and individualized support. More resources and people to help support a student. Children are not dangerous and using suspensions as a tool in place of early intervention and identification of special needs and supports, is harmful and shameful. There is no good reason to be suspending anyone for this long except for safety and that is already included in the current law.

A culture of punitive discipline creates a climate of fear and distrust, undermining the positive relationships essential for effective learning.

My 25 years of experience has demonstrated that early intervention and support, along with restorative approaches, are far more effective than exclusionary discipline. We must invest in resources that address the root causes of challenging behavior, such as:

Increased access to school counselors and social workers.

Enhanced professional development for educators in trauma-informed practices, restorative practices, and positive behavior supports.

Smaller class sizes to allow for more individualized attention, more special education staffing.

Weakening LD 165 would be a detrimental step backward for Maine's educational system. I urge you to prioritize the well-being and educational success of our youngest learners by maintaining the current protections and investing in proactive, supportive strategies.

I respectfully request that you reconsider any proposed changes that would make it easier to suspend our elementary students.

Sincerely,

Alberto Morales
Assistant Principal
Portland Public Schools