

Testimony in Support of LD 165
An Act to Allow School Boards to Expel or Suspend Students Regardless of Grade Level
March 13, 2025

Chairman Rafferty and Members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee,

My name is Olivia Kelly, and I am a resident of Islesboro, Maine. I write to you on behalf of Restorative Justice Project Maine's Legislative Committee.

Today, we urge you to consider amending LD 165, a bill which proposes eliminating existing protection for students 5th grade and below from expulsion. We recommend that in place of this revision, the committee considers implementing a provision for restorative practices as a first line response to such disciplinary cases. The restorative process provides an opportunity for conflict resolution and community building, shifting the priority in the face of misconduct from punitive discipline to accountability. If the purpose of this bill is truly to enhance and protect the "peace and usefulness of the school" as an educational institution, implementing restorative practices offer a far more promising solution, especially in the case of our youngest students, which LD 165 seeks to punish.

Implementing a restorative process as a first course of action benefits not only the child who has engaged in misconduct and their peers, but the greater community as it holds the potential to stop a cycle of misbehavior and continuous expulsions. It is critical to demonstrate the importance of accountability and reconciliation in educational settings such that our students may develop into responsible and community minded citizens.

Core to restorative practices is the strengthening and repair of communities, at the core of which are our schools. We urge the committee to amend LD 165 to include a provision for implementing restorative justice as a first line response for all school children, but particularly those in fifth grade and below prior to consideration of expulsion.

Thank you.

On behalf of Restorative Justice Project Maine,

Olivia Kelly

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