

## TESTIMONY OF LGBTQ+ Coalition

### LD 165 – Ought Not to Pass

#### An Act to Allow School Boards to Expel or Suspend Students Regardless of Grade Level

#### Joint Standing Committee on Education & Cultural Affairs

April 11, 2025

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, greetings. We are writing to provide additional testimony, opposing LD 165.

As a coalition focused on LGBTQ+ rights, exclusionary discipline is of particular interest to our organizations. Decades of research show that exclusionary discipline—in and out of school suspensions and expulsions—disproportionately impact LGBTQ+ youth.<sup>1</sup>

LGBTQ+ youth are more likely to experience negative school climates, including harassment and discrimination, which can lead to higher rates of exclusionary discipline.<sup>2</sup> When these students are punished, rather than receiving support or intervention, they face worsened academic outcomes, increased risk of mental health challenges, and a higher likelihood of disengaging from school altogether. These outcomes not only hinder academic success but also perpetuate a cycle of exclusion that disproportionately impacts an already vulnerable population.

Exclusionary discipline practices fail to address the root causes of LGBTQ+ students' behavioral challenges, often linked to being bullied by peers and adults in schools. Studies have shown that LGBTQ+ youth are more likely to experience school-based bullying, with a 2021 report from the Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (GLSEN) revealing that over 76% of LGBTQ+ students reported being verbally harassed due to their sexual orientation or gender identity.<sup>3</sup> When schools fail to create inclusive, supportive environments and instead rely on exclusionary measures, educators inadvertently reinforce the marginalization of LGBTQ+ students. As such, these practices contribute to the widening gap between these students' academic and social experiences compared to their peers.

Please vote LD 165 ought not to pass.

ACLU of Maine

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<sup>1</sup> See Ceema Samimi et al., *What is Known About LGBTQ Youth and Exclusionary Discipline? A Scoping Review*, Journal of Homosexuality (2024), available at <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/39480172/>; Shannon Snapp et al., *School Pushout: The Role of Supportive Strategies Versus Punitive Practices for LGBT Youth of Color*, Journal of Research on Adolescence : The Official Journal of the Society for Research on Adolescence (2022), available at <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/35026049/>.

<sup>2</sup> See Stephen Russell et al., *Promoting School Safety for LGBTQ and All Students*, Policy Insights: Behavioral Brain Science (2021), available at <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/34557581/>.

<sup>3</sup> Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network, *The 2021 National School Climate Survey* (2022), available at <https://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/2022-10/NSCS-2021-Full-Report.pdf>.

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