

Testimony in Opposition to LD 165 - "An Act to Allow School Boards to Expel or Suspend Students Regardless of Grade Level"

Submitted by: David Motel  
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Waterville, ME resident & parent of a 7-year-old student

Dear Members of the Committee,

I write to express my strong opposition to LD 165, which would allow schools to suspend children as young as Pre-K through 5th grade for more than three days - and potentially indefinitely. As both a parent and a Maine State Parent Ambassador, I have seen firsthand how harmful extended suspensions are for young children, and I urge you to reject this bill.

Research clearly shows that suspending young children doesn't improve behavior - it increases academic struggles, social isolation, and future disciplinary problems. At this critical age, children need support and intervention, not exclusion. Allowing five-day (or longer) suspensions for 5-year-olds will only push struggling students further behind, making behavioral issues worse.

While the bill no longer includes expulsion, it creates a dangerous loophole: administrators could extend suspensions without any clear limit if they claim they need time to "develop protocols" or "increase staff support." This lack of accountability is unacceptable. How long is too long? A week? A month? There are no safeguards to protect a child's right to education.

Instead of making it easier to remove young children from school, Maine should:

- Expand behavioral health supports in elementary schools
- Train staff in trauma-informed and restorative practices
- Provide early intervention before a child reaches crisis point

As the parent of a 7-year-old, I know young children act out for reasons - whether it's an undiagnosed learning disability, trauma, or simply needing better social-emotional guidance. Pushing them out of school solves nothing. It only punishes children for the system's failure to support them.

I urge you to vote "Ought Not to Pass" on LD 165 and focus instead on policies that keep kids in school while addressing the root causes of behavioral challenges.

Sincerely,

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