



Testimony of Rita Furlow
Maine Children's Alliance
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Education & Cultural Affairs
LD 165
An Act to Allow School Boards to Expel or Suspend Students Regardless of Grade Level
March 13, 2025

Good afternoon, Senator Rafferty and Representative Murphy, and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, my name is Rita Furlow. I am the Senior Policy Analyst at the Maine Children's Alliance. I am providing testimony in opposition to LD 165, *An Act to Allow School Boards to Expel or Suspend Students Regardless of Grade Level*. The Maine Children's Alliance is a statewide non-partisan, non-profit research and advocacy organization whose mission is to promote sound public policies to improve the lives of children, youth, and families in Maine.

We know from brain research conducted that the early years are crucial and lay the foundation for later development. While we often focus on whether children have the cognitive or language skills necessary for school, children also need emotional and social skills if they are going to succeed in school or future employment.

The emotional regulation or executive functioning skills are mental processes that are often described as the "air traffic control center" for the brain. Some of the core skills that children need to develop are related to regulating one's own behavior, being able shift and sustain attention, building and maintaining relationships, and managing difficult feelings, emotions, or frustrations. While children are not born with these skills, they are almost all born with the potential to develop them. We also know these are skills we can teach to young children.

In 2014, MCA began hearing about the removal of very young children from early childhood programs. We worked with this Committee and the Maine Children's Growth Council to gather data and further examine the issue in a report on children's social emotional learning and development that was submitted to this committee in 2017. In 2015, the US Department of Education and the US Department of Health and Human services issued joint Policy Statement on Expulsion and Suspension Policies in Early Childhood Settings.

Data from the Maine Department of Education finds suspensions continue to be used as a tool for our youngest children.

| School Year | Suspension Count | Expulsion Count |
|-------------|------------------|-----------------|
| 2018 | 1392 | * |
| 2019 | 1437 | 0 |
| 2020 | 949 | * |
| 2021 | 359 | 0 |
| 2022 | 830 | 0 |
| 2023 | 1046 | * |
| 2024 | 936 | * |

As our 2021 Kids Count publication indicates, Maine children are struggling with high rates of anxiety and depression. We need to intervene with policies and practices to support young children in elementary school before they become middle and high school students with more serious issues.

We agree with the policy change that this committee made in 2021 to curb the practice of suspending and expelling elementary school children. We urge you to reject efforts to weaken this law. Instead, children and teachers need access to addition supports, such as the Early Childhood Consultation Partnership. We urge the committee to invite staff from the Office of Child and Family Services to learn more about this effective program.

Young children who develop a love for school and learning and gain skills in negotiating disagreements, following directions, focusing their attention, regulating their emotions, and building strong relationships start school with a solid foundation. If they have not developed those skills, it is our job as adults to help them gain those skills to be successful in school and in life.

Thank you for your consideration.

What is ECCP®?

ECCP® helps early childhood providers and caregivers of young children build understanding and skills to respond to the social-emotional needs of young children. Experienced mental health consultants work directly with caregivers and early childhood providers to identify and implement strategies to support children's emotional wellbeing and effectively manage challenging behavior. Services are provided at no cost to providers or families.

ECCP® provides services to classrooms or individual children. Families, providers, educators, or directors may request services. The level of service provided is based on the needs of the program or individual child.

Consultation may be requested for anything from managing aggressive behaviors, difficulties with transitions, creating positive classroom cultures, improving responsiveness of teaching staff, and building effective partnerships with families.

Types of programs served:

- Licensed Child Care Centers
- Family Child Care Programs
- Public Pre-K Programs
- Public Elementary Schools
- Afterschool Programs



For more information or to make a referral

Contact:

ECCP Program

207-624-7930
1-877-680-5866

eccpprogram.dhhs@maine.gov



Scan the QR code to visit us
online and locate your local
ECCP consultant.

maine.gov/dhhs/ocfs



ECCP partner agencies:

Community Care
Community Health & Counseling Services
Sunrise Opportunities

For Educators and Caregivers
of Young Children



Maine Early Childhood Consultation Partnership

Helping relationships grow

Core Classroom Services

ECCP®'s Core Classroom service focuses on supporting and coaching teachers and child care providers to strengthen social, emotional, and behavioral supports for children in their program. The ECCP® Consultant provides weekly support and coaching to the teaching staff with the goal of building their capacity to meet the social-emotional needs of the classroom.

Who Can Make a Referral?

Referrals for Core Classroom services may be made by the center/program director, family child care provider, owner, or teacher.

Reasons to Refer

ECCP® is ideal for providers interested in improving behavior management in the classroom; improving the social and emotional tone of the classroom; and enhancing partnerships among teachers, parents and administrators. Consultants provide hands-on and practical strategies to support the social and emotional needs of the children in the program.

Child-Specific Services

ECCP®'s Child-Specific service focuses on supporting a young child who is struggling with social, emotional, or behavioral difficulties in their education or child care setting. The ECCP® Consultant meets with the family and the educator/caregiver, conducts a home and/or classroom observation to identify the child's strengths and needs, recommends practical strategies to meet the child's needs, and facilitates referrals to community services, if needed.

Who Can Make a Referral?

Referrals can be made by parents, providers, teachers, or program directors. The service is voluntary, and the child's family must provide consent for the service.

Reasons to Refer

A child who may be experiencing behavioral challenges, difficulty with attention, problems with social skills, or is at risk of suspension or expulsion from their child care setting may be referred. A child experiencing a stressful event such as the birth of a sibling, parental separation, loss of a family member, or a community stressor such as a natural disaster may also be referred for ECCP® services.

"The new resources our ECCP Consultant provided have been helpful in reducing negative behaviors, while strengthening tools already being used."

PARENT, CHILD-SPECIFIC SERVICE

Family Child Care Provider Services

ECCP® offers a specialized version of the Core Classroom service designed for the unique needs and environment of the family or home-based child care provider. This service focuses on supporting, coaching, and offering practical strategies to strengthen a provider's ability to help children express their emotions, manage peer dynamics, and respond effectively to challenging behaviors. Consultation is provided on-site at the program on a weekly basis. This is a strengths-based service that respects each program's needs and perspectives.

Who Can Make A Referral?

Family Child Care Providers may self-refer their programs. Child-Specific services may also be requested by Family Child Care Providers for individual children in the program, with parental consent.

Reasons to Refer

The Family Child Care Provider Service is a good resource for providers seeking to improve overall quality, introduce or strengthen social-emotional learning, help children with emotional regulation, improve transitions, or enhance relationships with families.

