



March 12, 2025

To: Educational and Cultural Affairs Committee

Dear Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and members of the Educational and Cultural Affairs Committee,

My name is Wendy LeBlanc, and I am the principal of Fairfield School, grades K through 2, in Saco. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about LD 165.

As an elementary school principal, I am deeply committed to keeping students in school and ensuring they receive the support they need to succeed. However, the reality is that dangerous student behaviors are an increasing challenge, impacting not only the safety and well-being of the child in crisis but also the ability of teachers to maintain a safe and productive learning environment for all students.

While I fully support efforts to limit the use of suspensions, schools must have the flexibility to address severe behaviors that pose a significant safety risk. Suspension would only be used in the most extreme cases, when no other immediate intervention is possible and time is needed to develop a safe, effective reintegration plan.

At Fairfield School, we have extensive experience supporting students with significant behavioral challenges. Our approach emphasizes positive interventions within a least restrictive environment to help students succeed. However, there are times following an incident when we need time to connect with families, adjust a student's Behavior Support Plan, and ensure the safety of all involved.

For example, one of our students recently became dysregulated and managed to climb into the ceiling area above our stage. While in this elevated and semi-enclosed space, the student accessed light bulbs and began throwing them at staff members below. Additionally, the student swung light fixtures and threw other large objects, creating a hazardous situation.

In another instance, a student removed their clothing on the playground and threw feces at staff. In cases like these, our team needs time to collaborate with the student's family, assess the risks, and revise the support plan to ensure a safe reintegration for both the student and staff. Immediate reintegration without proper planning is not only disruptive but also poses a significant safety risk. Without the option for

suspension in extreme cases, schools are left managing dangerous behaviors in real-time without the necessary time to develop and implement effective safety measures.

I support amending LD 165 to remove the suspension prohibition while maintaining the expulsion prohibition. This strikes a balance—allowing schools to prioritize interventions and restorative practices while also ensuring that staff have the necessary time to develop appropriate support plans in severe cases.

I urge you to consider the voices of educators working in schools every day. We want to support every child, but we also need the ability to protect the learning environment and provide staff with the time necessary to create meaningful behavior plans.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Wendy LeBlanc". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style. It is positioned to the right of a short vertical line.

Wendy LeBlanc, Principal

Fairfield School

Saco School Department