

April 26, 2021

Maine PRISONER ADVOCACY Coalition



Greetings Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and Honorable members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee.

My name is Jan Collins. I am assistant director of Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition, I taught 25 years of High School science and one year of special education, and I am currently vice-president of Franklin County Retired Educators. I am here to support **LD 474 LD 474 An Act Regarding School Discipline for Maine's Youngest Children**

MPAC's mission is to support Maine's incarcerated citizens, their families, and friends in their struggle with Maine's criminal justice system. Our purpose is to reduce Maine's use of incarceration by creating a criminal justice system that is ethical, humane, and restorative in nature. In this case, I appear before you in an effort to prevent children from entering the criminal justice system.

In my twenty-six years of classroom teaching I experienced more than my share of disciplinary issues, including at one point a simple assault. Like most teachers I was frustrated by a system that allowed few options and returned the student to the classroom with no new skills for coping with their frustration.

Out of school suspension is a recipe for disaster. It means the student inevitably falls behind, was both lost and swamped by make-up work, and often became frustrated and hopeless. It was a recipe for failure. Frequently, the student would simply drop out of school. As a high school teacher, I could see the direct result of our school suspension and expulsion policies.

In school suspensions were a little bit better. At least I could go to the suspension room during my prep period with assignments and provide an explanation of the directions. Even then, the student was not receiving the skills to deal with the underlying issues.

I am grateful to Representative Morales for sponsoring this bill. Suspensions and expulsions simply kick the can down the road without dealing with the underlying issues. It magnifies problems instead of solving them. When a child acts out in school, no matter what the age, it is a plea for help. It may be inarticulate, and poorly delivered, but it is still a plea.

I want to directly address the issue of local control. I believe the legislature has and should set baseline guidance on school district treatment of students. We do just that with seclusion and restraint policies. I believe this bill is an example of baseline guidance needed by schools in the area of discipline. It is a starting point for districts to develop a positive discipline policy that creates healing, not hurt.

We have much work to do in this area **LD 474 An Act Regarding School Discipline for Maine's Youngest Children** is a starting point.

Thank-you for your support.

Sincerely,
Jan M. Collins
janmariecollins57@gmail.com

Jan Collins
East Wilton/MPAC

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