

**MAINE
PRINCIPALS'
ASSOCIATION**



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*MPA is an Equal
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TO: Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs
FROM: Maine Principals' Association Legislative Committee
RE: In Opposition of LD 474: An Act Regarding School Discipline for Maine's Youngest Children
DATE: April 26, 2021

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. My name is Dr. Holly Couturier, and I am the Executive Director of the Maine Principals' Association – Professional Division. We represent more than 800 PreK-12 principals and assistant principals of public and private schools in Maine.

The MPA Legislative Committee unanimously opposes LD 474. Principals recognize and desire to keep all the students in their classes every day. We know that for a child to learn, they need to be in their classroom. There are programs, policies, procedures in place for both teachers and administrators to use to support students who need additional help in the classroom. Positive Behavior Intervention Supports, such as Restorative Justice, are used in buildings across the state and for most students these interventions work. There are times however, when they do not. There are times when a child's behavior becomes so dangerous that they could potentially cause harm to themselves or others. It is during these times that the student needs to be removed from the classroom. If the student is unable to return to the classroom because their behavior was so egregious, this bill would stop them from going into another classroom for the remainder of the day, or from being sent home until a safety plan can be put in place for the student to safely return to school. Keeping them in their classroom where they could potentially cause significant harm to themselves or others is not an option.

If a child is removed from their classroom and cannot return whether it is considered "in-school" or "out-of-school" suspension, the child is still being "suspended" because they are being denied access to their educational setting – for whatever period.

The passing of this bill ties the hands of the administrator to keep a potentially dangerous child in a classroom. Our job is to make sure that ALL students and staff are always safe. Our job is NOT to remove kids from their educational setting; however, this bill takes away from the building administrator's discipline discretion to make the best choice for all involved: both for the child causing the extreme disruption as well as for those who are either witness or fall victim to that child.

Our goal for these students who need to be removed is for them to be returned to their class as soon as possible. Creating a safety plan for them with a team including the principal, teacher, guidance/social workers, and the parent/guardian including some sort of social/emotional support to help that child is key for a successful return, but this takes time and until we can guarantee the safety for all students, not having that child be in the classroom until this plan is complete is necessary at times.

The MPA strongly urges the Committee to vote Ought Not to Pass on LD 474.