

Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs Chairpersons Senator Joseph Rafferty and Representative Michael Brennan Public Hearing on LD 474: An Act Regarding School Discipline for Maine's Youngest Children Testimony in Support of LD 474

Good Morning Chairpersons Rafferty and Brennan and members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, My name is Tucker Goddu I am 12 years old and I live in Cumberland. I support LD 474.

Let me tell you a little bit about why I do.

I'm the kind of kid that you don't know something is different about me at first glance. My illness is not obvious. However, before doctors were able to diagnose me correctly, I had a really hard time with school. I couldn't stay in my clear and present brain for long periods of time and I was often asked to leave the classroom when I was younger. Recess was taken away from me as punishment. I was often isolated from others. I already felt badly about myself. This was so stressful. Not only did I feel so different than everyone, I couldn't learn. I didn't feel safe. I didn't trust anyone at school.

Long story, but what I remember about this time, was my mom pulling me out of school and lots of doctor appointments. She was basically the only person who I trusted and I could relax and tell her what was bothering me. She knew I needed medical help and brought me to lots of doctors until someone understood my symptoms.

I share this because I'm lucky in some ways. If my mom didn't know to get me to doctors, what would my schooling have looked like? I would have been labeled a problem kid.

Many professionals say taking away recess as punishment can hurt their brains, the same goes with suspension. It makes them feel excluded. Often it is people who have disabilities or other inequities such as race. These students are mislabeled and shouldn't be sent home. What if their home is unsafe? What message is that kid going to hear? They'll hear that the school doesn't care about them and they are being excluded. Instead, they should be helped. Teachers should be trained in new ways to support kids with extra needs. Schools should also look at

their students with extra needs and respond with more social workers who can make a connection with the kid.

Did you know, we wouldn't even be the first state to make this rule? Our students will benefit from the other states' examples. We can follow in their footsteps and ask questions to help all kids, including kids like me. I also want to point out that it isn't just the troubled kids who will benefit. It's ALL of our students. Students who are deemed "good kids" are also at risk for having chronic stress around the fact that they could lose recess. How can you think and learn if you're constantly having the threat of being punished hanging over your head?

I can answer that- you can't.

I learned about this bill because I am researching about using prison for rehabilitation instead of punishment for my ELA class. When I heard about this, it made me think about how only showing support and help to our youngest students could change their life for the better. My research shows the school to prison pipeline is real and yet we could change this by passing this bill.

I ask you today to take action that shows you support ALL Maine students. We want to grow up in a society that shows adults really care about our children. LD 474 is a step towards making this happen. Thank you for your time.

Tucker Goddu
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