

April 25, 2020

Good morning,

My name is Ange Ishimwe and I'm a current 17 year old high school senior at Portland High School. First, I would like to thank Victoria Morales for bringing this bill to the floor because I truly believe that this bill will be able to positively change young lives. I have been fortunate and blessed enough to have access to certain programs and services due to the amount of emphasis my parents placed on education since I was young. I have been a member of certain programs like Youth People Council, Black Student Union, Olympia Snowe's Women's Leadership Institute, and National Honor Society just to name a few. Due to these opportunities, I managed to get into Bowdoin College and Northeastern University with great financial aid. Although I come from a place of privilege, I'm still able to recognize and empathize with others that have been unable to get the same opportunities due to their pasts and the environments in which they have been in since birth.

I strongly support the bill because I have personally witnessed my peers go down the wrong path due to them being expelled. I currently have a younger sister who's nine years old and I can't imagine her being expelled from school because she is a child. Children that are in K-5 are extremely young and are susceptible to making mistakes due to them still developing and not fully grasping the consequences of their actions. There are multiple things that I did as a child that I regret but I don't dwell on them because at that point in life I did not know much. When schools expel children they do not take into consideration the reason for the child's behavior. Since children are easily impressionable, they can be mirroring negative/abusive behaviors they have seen occurring in their own homes. It is up to schools to educate those children and show them positive and healthy ways to interact with others rather than tossing them to the side and giving up on them. Children with behavioral issues should be taken care of and taught the right way to deal with their problems while they're still young because once they grow, those behaviors are a lot more permanent. In my AP Psychology class, we discussed how it was a lot easier for young children to learn new languages due to them not being fully developed and I believe that behaviors are the exact way. Those issues should be dealt with while they're young to prevent issues during adulthood.

By expelling children, schools are also placing a label on them and dividing them from the rest of the students. From what I remember when I was a kid, there were some people I avoided because they were "bad" kids and if I were to hang out with them, I'd also become a "bad" kid, which is far from true. That negative label affects children by making others believe that they're "bad" kids and they also personally begin to believe that they're bad kids and their actions mirror what others expect of them. There are multiple people who are the same age as me who dropped out of school and turned to drugs just because they did not have anybody to believe in them. I support this bill because it would prevent schools from robbing children of their futures. Children deserve to be treated with kindness and care because they do not have that much autonomy over their own lives. They can be victims of abuse and neglect which leads them to act out because they

do not understand how to properly deal with their emotions. Instead of punishing the children, schools should offer them the support they need in order to grow up to be mentally and physically healthy adults who can positively contribute to society. Children should never be treated like a liability.

Another factor that should be taken into consideration is the race of the student being expelled. According to the National Center for Education Statistics in the years 2000 to 2016, there have been more minority students expelled than white students. Schools having the power to expel students makes it easier to maintain racist systems that have worked for white Americans at the expense of minorities. Realistically, black and brown children are never offered the same benefit of doubt that many white children are offered. This is evident in the different ways 17 year old Kyle Rittenhouse and 16 year old Ma'Khia Bryant were treated by law enforcement. Kyle Rittenhouse managed to shoot and kill two people and was not treated roughly by the police while Ma'Khia Bryant was shot and killed by law enforcement for holding a knife. Rittenhouse was not shot and killed by law enforcement due to the color of his skin and if Bryant had been a 16 year old white girl, she would have still been here today. America has continuously treated people of color as though they were threats to society and allowing young black and brown children to be kicked out of schools will do nothing but perpetuate racist stereotypes. A majority of the administrators in Maine schools are white and I cannot bring myself to believe that they will be able to put their prejudices aside and treat children of color the same way that they will treat white children. I do not say this to insinuate that administrators are racist or unfair but unconscious bias is something that many of us cannot control and Maine is one of the whitest states. I strongly support this bill and believe it will help secure the future of Maine by ensuring all children get the education and care they need.