

Joshua Ottow  
Principal

My name is Joshua Ottow, a resident of Cumberland, Maine. I offer testimony in favor of passage of LD 474 - An Act Regarding School Discipline for Maine's Youngest Children. I am a longtime school principal and member of the Maine Principals Association.

In my 14 years as a school administrator in Maine, I have the struggles that many children have with their behavior in school. What we know about the children that struggle most in school is that they need a thorough and comprehensive response to help them improve. Child Psychologist Dr. Ross Green, PhD said, "All kids will do will do if they can do well." It is the responsibility of those working closely with the child (parent, teachers, counselors, administrators) to first identify why the child is struggling with their behavior in school and engaged in a collaborative problem-solving process towards addressing the underlying root causes of misbehavior. This is really hard work and it must be done.

Out of school suspension, while easier in the moment, is not usually helpful for the struggling child. While it is may be better for the school in that moment, it is not in the best interest of the child longer term. Through the use of alternative learning environments, spaces and protocols for reflection and repair, and facilitated restorative exercises, the child will receive the needed behavioral educational plan. We would never kick a kid out of school if they were struggling with math or literacy at school, but yet we seem to be ok with punishing and shaming students who are struggling with emotional and stimulus regulation. These students need the best possible intervention we can use with them, not just the easiest. This just doesn't make sense. I trust the amazing and talented educators to make this work.