

Flynn Ross  
Westbrook

Representative Brennan, Senator Rafferty, and members of the Committee On Education and Cultural Affairs, thank you for your service and attention to this issue.

I am Dr. Flynn Ross, chair of teacher education at the University of Southern Maine, however, on this issues I speak as an individual citizen, as I am not authorized to represented USM or the University of Maine System.

I have worked in thousands of classrooms in hundreds of schools in six states during my 30 year career. I strongly support LD 474 and urge you to pass it.

School expulsion and suspension, especially for Maine's Youngest Children in fifth grade and below, are what adults do when required to by outdated historical 'zero-tolerance' policies. This bill addresses this by requiring the removal of these policies from outdated student codes of conduct. I am glad to say that in my research Maine's practitioners rarely use expulsion and in many districts have moved away from using suspension. Educators know they are not effective tools, we have much better means for addressing students behaviors.

While I was in my doctoral program at Teachers College, Columbia University in New York City there was a research project at the Julia Richmond Complex. It was a high school of over 2,000 students with metal detectors and uniformed police officers at every door. Student academic performance was abysmal and discipline rates were very high. The project transformed the school into 5 separate schools of 400 students based on building strong personal relationships and demilitarizing school culture. They removed all police officers, metal detectors and student achievement, graduation rates, and college attendance rates all increased significantly.

I taught in rural Arkansas where "paddling" - corporal punishment - was still used. My 18-20 year old high school students returned from jail to my classroom where I used star charts and incentive plans. These were very effective along with positive relationships to promote learning and appropriate classroom behavior.

Like me, most of Maine's educators know that expulsion and suspension are not effective, they do not change children's behavior. Rather they are destructive to academic and behavioral outcomes. We have and are able to use much better alternatives.