

**Testimony of Lisa McArthur
Community Organizing Student
University of Connecticut School of Social Work**

Planning and Development Committee

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Clerk: David Velez
Room 2100, LOB 860-240-0550

March 10, 2010

Greetings Honorable Senators and Representatives,

My name is Lisa McArthur and I am a Master's of Social Work Student at the University of Connecticut School of Social Work. I have been employed in the human service field for a number of years, providing supports to children and families.

I am here today to testify on Bill #197, An Act Concerning In- School suspensions, which is proposing yet another delay to Connecticut's 2007 suspension law.

What message is sent to youths when they receive out of school suspensions? In my daily work, I have observed a growing number of children and youths who willfully and intentionally exhibit defiant behavior in school in order to be suspended. Jason, a nine year old African American male with whom I work, recently received his third out of school suspension in less than 30 school calendar days. According to Connecticut Voices for Children, nearly two-thirds of suspensions were for "school policy violations" (mainly "insubordination/disrespect," "obscene language and/or behavior" and attendance violations).

Jason's suspensions have been attributed to defiant and disrespectful behavior, with few incidents of violence towards himself or others.

Students often view suspension as a vacation away from school and sometimes act out in order to secure a break(Connecticut Voices for Children, 2009). Although Jason is a bright and intelligent youth, he clearly articulates that he purposely becomes defiant because he knows that he will be sent home from school. Connecticut Court Support

Services Division noted that in 2007, 89% of youths involved in the juvenile justice system had been suspended or expelled.

In this very same conversation, Jason disclosed that he would rather be a "thug" which is not surprising based on his growing exposure to neighborhood criminal acts and behaviors that occur sometimes during the days when he has been suspended. Let me not forget to mention that Jason is cared for by a single parent, and when Jason is suspended his parent is forced to leave work, which negatively impacts the family's much needed income.

The story that I have shared about Jason and his family highlights a few of the negative of effects of out of school suspensions. While there is no doubt that Jason's behavior, (like many other school aged children) requires disciplinary measures, there are alternative methods such as detention, community service or loss of privileges which would allow Jason and other children to be maintained in school. Research shows that suspension exacerbates the likelihood of student alienation, delinquency, crime, and substance abuse(American Academy of Pediatrics, 2003). Children should remain in school and should only receive out of school suspensions when other measures have been exhausted.

I oppose S.B. 197, and I respectfully hope that you will not support this legislation.

Thank you very much for your time.