



Testimony Opposing HB 5445: An Act Concerning Alternative Educational Opportunities of Expelled Students

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Senator Slossberg, Senator Boucher, Representative Fleischmann, Representative Lavielle and esteemed members of the Education Committee.

We are submitting testimony today on behalf of Connecticut Voices for Children, a research-based child advocacy organization working to ensure that all Connecticut children have an equitable opportunity to achieve their full potential. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in opposition to HB 5445: An Act Concerning Alternative Educational Opportunities of Expelled Students.

A robust education is essential for all students to ensure that they are able to pursue their chosen dreams and goals. But, that same education is essential in ensuring the economic competitiveness of the communities, towns that they come from and by extension - the entire state. For Connecticut to ensure that it remains strong into the future, education of all of its students must be made a priority.

For a decade, Connecticut Voices for Children has conducted research on school climate and discipline with a particular focus on reducing racial and ethnic disparities in school discipline. During this decade, Connecticut has drastically reduced its use of exclusionary discipline from 11 percent of Connecticut students experiencing a suspension or expulsion in the 2007-2008 school year¹ to less than 7 percent of Connecticut students experiencing a suspension or expulsion in the 2015-2016 school year.² Despite these significant gains, Connecticut still has gaping disparities in the race and ethnicity of students who are expelled,³ and while expelled these students fall behind.⁴ In light of our

¹ Connecticut State Department of Education. (2009). "The Condition of Education in Connecticut." Retrieved from: <http://edsight.ct.gov/relatedreports/Condition%20of%20Education%202007-08.pdf>

² Connecticut State Department of Education. (2016). "The Condition of Education in Connecticut: 2015-2016." Retrieved from: <http://edsight.ct.gov/relatedreports/Condition%20of%20Education%202015-16.pdf>

³ Stokes Hudson, Camara. (2018). "The Black-White Education Gap in Connecticut: Indicators of Inequality in Access and Outcomes." *Connecticut Voices for Children*. Retrieved from: <http://www.ctvoices.org/publications/black-white-education-gap-connecticut-indicators-inequality-access-and-outcomes>

⁴ Connecticut State Department of Education. (2017, December). *Understanding School Expulsions in Connecticut*. Report to the State Board of Education. Retrieved from https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/.../Understanding_School_Expulsions_in_Connecticut.pdf

historical and ongoing work,Voices serves on the Alternative Schools Committee and participated in drafting the “Guidelines for Educational Opportunities for Students who have Been Expelled” document issued to the State Board of Education, and we are currently working to draft a “Best Practices for Implementation” document.

HB 5445 reverses the changes required by Public Act 17-220,⁵ signed into law last year, and the standards recently adopted by the State Board of Education (SBE) that created minimum requirements for the kinds of alternative education that districts can provide to students who are expelled.⁶ The standards that were adopted by the SBE and recommended by the Alternative Schools Committee required that expelled students be provided a full-time education that aligns with state standards. Removal of these standards takes away essential educational supports from students who are expelled, leaving them to fall behind in school - which has negative impacts on both their educational and social development.

As it stands, education for expelled students in Connecticut is extremely lacking. A recent report by the State Department of Education (SDE) suggests that a large portion of expelled students are receiving homework as their only educational support during the average 115 days that students are expelled.⁷ In the 2016-2017 school year, 45 percent of expelled students were only receiving homework, which is increased from 34 percent in the 2014-2015 school year.⁸ On the other hand, the number of expelled students in structured alternative school programs has decreased by 12 percent.⁹ Homework is not enough for students to keep up with their education while not in school; it is an effective tool for reviewing familiar information but not an effective tool for learning unfamiliar information.¹⁰ Thus, structured education for expelled students is an important part of school re-engagement.¹¹ Without it, students fall further and further behind in school, making it harder for them to re-engage.

We believe that re-engagement of these students is essential because the impacts of expulsions on future life outcomes are clear and often extreme. Students who are expelled are significantly more likely to be involved in the juvenile justice system after their expulsion and are more likely to drop out as well.¹²

The Legislature, the SDE, and the SBE took essential steps in the last few years to ensure that expelled students received the necessary educational supports. H.B 5445 unravels these standards, leaving many expelled students were they were a year ago, missing 115 days of school with only homework to do.

⁵ Connecticut General Assembly Public Act 17-220, An Act Concerning Education Relief (2017) (enacted). Retrieval at <https://www.cga.ct.gov/2017/act/pa/pdf/2017PA-00220-R00HB-07276-PA.pdf>

⁶ Connecticut State Department of Education. (2018). *Standards for Educational Opportunities For Students Who Have Been Expelled*.

⁷ *Ibid*, note 4

⁸ *Ibid*, note 4

⁹ *Ibid*, note 4

¹⁰ Cooper, H. (1989). Synthesis of research on homework. *Educational leadership*, 47(3), 85-91.

¹¹ Sattuerburg, D. T., Stringer, V. A., & Lee, C. C. (2015). Re-engaging Youth with the Protective Power of Education. *Seattle Journal for Social Justice*, 13(3), 857-898. Retrieved from <https://digitalcommons.law.seattleu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=1778&context=sjsj>.

¹² Fabelo, Tony, Michael D. Thompson, Martha Plotkin, Dottie Carmichael, Miner P. Marchbanks, III, and Eric A. Booth. Breaking Schools Rules: A Statewide Study of How School Discipline Relates to Student Success and Juvenile Justice Involvement. Rep. The Council of State Governments: Justice Center and Public Policy Research Institute, 19 July 2011. Web. https://csgjusticecenter.org/wpcontent/uploads/2012/08/Breaking_Schools_Rules_Report_Final.pdf

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. If there are any follow up questions, we can be reached at lruth@ctvoices.org and chudson@ctvoices.org or (203) 498-4240.