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March 16, 2021

To: House Committee On Education

From: Amy Miller, Executive Director  
Jennifer McGowan, SchoolWorks Program Manager  
Chris Shank, SchoolWorks Staff Attorney

Re: **Support for HB 2945**

Dear Chair Alanso Leon, Vice-Chair Neron, Vice-Chair Weber and Members of the Committee,

Youth, Rights & Justice is Oregon's only non-profit juvenile public defense firm. Every year, YRJ represents over 1200 children and parents in Oregon's juvenile court system. All of our clients come from low-income families. Most have suffered significant trauma and many have physical, mental health and/or substance abuse issues. Approximately 45% are children of color. Because of our unique position handling court-appointed juvenile cases, we often see the same systemic problems and we work to change the policies that contribute to these problems.

YRJ established our SchoolWorks program in 2002 to help our clients succeed in school. SchoolWorks provides legal advocacy to ensure students are enrolled in school, able to attend classes, and are not unfairly excluded due to excessive discipline. To date, SchoolWorks attorneys have handled over 3,200 cases, all aimed at ensuring students achieve their goals and graduate.

**YRJ Supports HB 2945.**

HB 2945 directs school districts to provide access to educational materials and necessary educational and support services to students who have been suspended or expelled. The bill also requires districts to collect and submit data to ODE on the use of these exclusionary discipline practices in their district. YRJ believes this bill is necessary to ensure our clients have access to the education materials and supportive services that are essential to their continued educational progress. YRJ also believes it is an important step to address the racial inequities in disciplinary practices in Oregon schools.

Students who are subjected to exclusionary discipline practices like suspension and expulsion are often already struggling academically. Ensuring that these students can maintain access to their ongoing schoolwork is crucial so they don't fall even further behind. In addition, many of the students who struggle to meet school behavior expectations use school based mental health and behavior support to learn important coping skills so they can be successful in managing their emotions and behavior in the school setting. Suspensions and expulsions take these essential services away from the students who

need them the most. HB 2945 would address this problem and ensure access to these important services.

Many studies have demonstrated that exclusionary disciplinary practices are ineffective in curbing unwanted behavior in the school setting. In addition, the students subjected to exclusionary discipline have more negative student outcomes including increased disengagement, loss of instructional time, and higher rates of absenteeism, truancy and dropout. Just one suspension from school increases a student's likelihood of dropping out by up to 29% and each additional suspension increases that likelihood by an additional 10%.<sup>1</sup> Data indicates that students who have suspended even once have a higher likelihood of being incarcerated. If the student is suspended twice, that rate jumps to 60% more likely.<sup>2</sup>

[A study](#) conducted by the Center for Promise and cited by the National Education Association found that students who were suspended or expelled were more likely to drop out of school for three reasons: "the true root of the problem was not addressed, their learning was interrupted, and the students did not feel valued or connected to their school community."<sup>3</sup> HB 2945 would help ensure that students' learning is not interrupted and that students remain connected to their school community.

We know that nationally, Black students are suspended and expelled three times more often than their white peers with no evidence that they misbehave at a higher rate. That means that all of the negative effects of exclusionary discipline are experienced by Black students at a far higher rate. This inequity leads to higher incarceration rates and higher rates of poverty. HB 2945 will quantify the disproportionate impact exclusionary discipline practices are having on black and indigenous students and provide assistance to districts regarding ways to address this disparity. This could be an important step toward addressing some of the roots of systemic racism in Oregon.

HB 2945 seeks to curb the deleterious effects of suspension and expulsion by keeping students engaged in academic work, connected to their school community and linked to crucial services. It also seeks to identify and address racial inequities in school district disciplinary practices. YRJ urges you to support this bill.

Thank you for your consideration of this important issue.

Sincerely,

Amy Miller  
Executive Director

Jennifer McGowan  
SchoolWorks Program Manager

Chris Shank  
SchoolWorks Staff Attorney

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.americaspromise.org/opinion/link-between-suspensions-expulsions-and-dropout-rates>

<sup>2</sup> <https://diverseeducation.com/article/116450/>

<sup>3</sup> Luster, Sara. 2018. "How Exclusionary Discipline Creates Disconnected Students." NEA News. <https://www.nea.org/advocating-for-change/new-from-nea/how-exclusionary-discipline-creates-disconnected-students>