

Chair Alonso-Leon, Vice-Chair Neron and Vice-Chair Weber, and members of the committee. My name is Janelle Bynum and I represent House District 51, which includes East Portland, Damascus, Gresham, Boring, North Clackamas, and Happy Valley.

I am here as a legislator, a mother, and a voice for the marginalized.

Being a student of color in Oregon's schools is difficult. There is literature that doesn't include your history. There is relentless bullying and there is racism baked into the minds of teachers and administrators. On top of all of that is the improper utilization of policies to target and exclude you. With all of these negative pressures, it becomes easy to get frustrated and give up your hopes of academic success.

Consider one such story from Janet Neron-Nyongoro who requested this bill. She reached out to me about disproportionate exclusionary discipline against students of color in the Beaverton School District. She told me that her daughter River experienced serious bias from one of her teachers during her freshman year which made her feel uncomfortable and shut down. She contacted the principal and Superintendent informing them of the situation and providing them some requests for action. When River was suspended with the intent to expel in March of 2019, River was not provided any educational resources. Furthermore, the Principal of Sunset High School told me that she would not be entering school until after the expulsion was agreed to. She was not comfortable with River being out of school for 8+ weeks without any opportunity to learn. Upon the expulsion, River was sent to Bridges Academy (a segregated school). At the end of the 2018/2019 school, year BSD decided to decommission Bridges Academy and move the students over to a school called Merlo Station (the new Bridges Academy). In researching the topic of the disproportionate discipline of students of color, she was shocked at how much disparity exists in the data between students of color vs. white students. Teachers of color have also flagged this disparity for me.

Today, I want to change part of that story. I am here to advocate for the marginalized student who when a suspension is imposed doesn't feel disconnected from their work and their school. This means that students still receive their classwork, retains access to their classes, still have transport for educational purposes, get the necessary support services like counseling, and also receive meals so they can continue nourishing themselves.

If we do not start supporting students more thoroughly in our schools, we won't have them there. We know where that road leads. We don't need any more school-to-prison pipelines. We need school-to-success pipelines for all students.

We have to do more for these students. These students are who we need right now. We need these students to grow up and become counselors, educators, and legislators. They're capable of building a better world than we have if we include them. We can include them with your support for HB 2945.