

Committee Members,

I would like to voice strong opposition to the –A7 amendment to SB 236 on behalf of private, faith-based schools that offer early learning opportunities. A blanket amendment removing the ability to suspend or expel any child for any reason is short-sighted and will have a negative impact on our ability to continue to provide early learning services. We rarely exclude a child from preschool or childcare, but there are rare circumstances where we have to ask a family to withdraw their student because they are simply not a fit for our institution. Private, faith-based preschool/childcare divisions do not receive public funding, so we do not have the resources to provide the on-site services for children with extensive learning or behavioral needs. In some cases, after trying many different in-house solutions, we have to inform a family that we simply cannot meet their needs. In other rare cases, a student will show violent tendencies that, even after employing several different strategies of mitigation, leave us with no choice but to exclude that child from our early learning community for the safety of other children. There are also other potential conflicts involving faith and morality that could come into play in order for us to stay true to our spiritual mission. These instances would be extremely rare at the early learning stage, but parents are our ultimate clients so it needs to be mentioned. Excluding a child from our private preschool/childcare is never done lightly and only happens rarely, after multiple attempts by the staff to work with the student and family to find solutions have proven unsuccessful.

We have seen a number of early learning centers in our area close over the past several years, and the need for qualified care continues to grow. Removing the ability of private, faith-based institutions to make enrollment decisions will severely hamper our ability to sustain our preschool/childcare operations.

Thank you for taking the time to consider the needs of private, faith-based organizations and our greater community.