



# Oregon Pediatric Society

A Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics. Incorporated in Oregon

DATE: February 15, 2021

TO: Senator Dembrow, Chair; Vice-Chair Thomsen; and the Senate Committee on Education

FROM: Lauren J. Herbert, MD, FAAP  
Member of the Oregon Pediatric Society

SUBJECT: Support SB 236 – Studying Early Childhood Suspension and Expulsion

Senators,

I am writing in support of SB 236 as I, the Oregon Pediatric Society, and the American Academy of Pediatrics are concerned that early childhood suspension and expulsion is not addressing the underlying stressors that lead children to misbehave. Children need support to learn appropriate social behaviors, and their families need help to address the financial and social stressors that impair their abilities to provide structure for their children's behavior.

I am a pediatrician who has been practicing in the Eugene-Springfield area for 25 years. The majority of the children in my clinic are low income. Most of them are thriving in their loving families. However, sometimes the difficulties are too much: for example, when a child's parent dies, when the child is witness to domestic violence, or when the child and the family become homeless. Children who suffer such loss often exhibit difficult behavior. They need help and their families need support.

In a study of preschool suspension and expulsion published in August 2019 in *Child Abuse and Neglect*, the authors found that children had a statistically much higher likelihood of being suspended or expelled if they have Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). Kids living in a household with domestic violence have a suspension/expulsion odds ratio (OR) or correlation of 10.6; with mental illness an OR 9.8; and with substance use an OR 4.8. In the discussion, the study authors state that "children being suspended or expelled may be denied access to meaningful early intervention for their disabilities or mental health issues," and that there are appropriate interventions to help preschool children with ACEs.



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Children experiencing early suspension and expulsion are more likely to have difficulty succeeding in school over time, and they are more likely to be involved in the juvenile justice system. In 2013, the American Academy of Pediatrics advocated that instead of suspending or expelling students, these practices be replaced with prevention efforts that focus on early identification of support needs for the child and family.

We need to see the misbehavior of children in preschool as a probable call for help. Studying this issue further will help us find ways to intervene to improve lifelong outcomes for a child and their family. Please vote yes on SB 236.

Reference: Songtian Zeng, et.al. (2019) *Adverse childhood experiences and preschool suspension expulsion: A population study*. Child Abuse and Neglect 97 (2019) 104149