

Testimony

Oregon State House Education Committee

*HB 2166-1 – Early Childhood Suspension and Expulsion*

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Capitol Building, Salem, OR

**Participant for the record:**

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Chair Alonso Leon, Vice Chair Neron, Vice Chair Weber, Representative Hudson, Representative Owens, Representative Reardon, Representative Ruiz, Representative Brock Smith, Representative Sollman, and Representative Wright, my name is Martha Brooks. I am the State Director of Fight Crime: Invest in Kids and ReadyNation, a bipartisan, non-profit organization of senior law enforcement and business leaders with over 200 members in Oregon. Our law enforcement and business leaders have long understood that to get children started on the right path in life, help them get ready for and graduate from school, and put them on a path to success and become a part of our workforce, investments need to be made all the way along the continuum of their lives. That includes how we appropriately address how our kids are treated and supported. That is why **we support HB 2166-1** and the elimination of suspension and expulsion for young children, infants and toddlers.

You might be wondering why law enforcement and business leaders are interested in the suspension and expulsion of young children. They are interested because they know that success early in life translates into success later through increased graduation rates, reduced involvement in crime, and greater success in the future. Our members from across the state are very concerned about the large number of kids who are experiencing unnecessarily punitive and exclusionary discipline so early in their lives, contributing to many eventually disengaging early on from school and failing to graduate. Research has shown that nationally as many as 50,000 preschoolers are suspended every year and another 17,000 are expelled from preschool. We know this number is under-reported. **Children in preschools are more than three times as likely to be kicked out as kids in kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade.**

Every year, parents enroll their young children in preschool and childcare programs with the great hope that their kids get the right start in life. Instead, for many, that dream is dashed. It is hard to imagine telling a 2-, 3- or 4-year old so early in life that they are a failure. But that is exactly what is being telegraphed when a young child with undiagnosed learning disabilities or behavioral issues are being expelled and/or suspended, believe me I know. I have a great nephew who was “kicked out” of three preschool centers before the age of 5. His learning disabilities went undiagnosed and that turned into behavioral issues as frustrations rose. School was never fun for him. It was traumatic and hard.

Instead of expulsion and suspension, attention to behavioral issues and learning disabilities are key. Identifying problems early and giving children support where needed can cut suspension and expulsion. Providing support to teachers, as well, in the form of early childhood mental health consultants, has been shown to be effective. And research also demonstrates that attending pre-k versus not attending pre-k can reduce later disciplinary problems and increase graduation rates.



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For our law enforcement and business leaders who have seen the benefits of quality preschool and childcare, it is shocking to see the statistics of those who are denied the incredible benefits of early education because they are suspended or expelled at such an early age. Unfortunately, the children most in need of support are being excluded.

In connection with the \$5.8 million in the Governor's Recommended Budget, HB 2166-1 and SB 236 will address the issues of early childhood suspension and expulsion by:

- Providing a clear and defined definition of suspension and expulsion,
- Supporting coaching and training for early childhood care providers and educators to build strong programs,
- Supporting Oregon's early child care and education providers in building the skills necessary to identify and manage learning disabilities, mental health issues, and behavior issues,
- Collecting the data that is critical to improving programs and maintaining accountability,
- Working to end suspension and expulsion of young children.

**Too many kids are getting kicked out before kindergarten.** HB 2166-1 is so important to reversing this trend and aiding to the success of our youngest children. **Besides funding, HB 2166-1 should be passed in conjunction with SB 236** in order for full coordination and integration of early childhood suspension and expulsion programs. By addressing the needs of our state's youngest kids, we guarantee that more of them will be responsible, successful adults.