T.S. and Antoine Scales
Testimony Submitted to the Ohio Senate Education Committee
Hearing on HB 410
September 27, 2016

T.S.

Good afternoon members of the Senate Education Committee. My name is T.S. and I'm here to tell you about school discipline pieces of HB 410.

In my school, I see that zero tolerance policy is active. Students aren't getting second chances. A lot of students don't have conversations with the administration, so the administrators don't know them and just judge them based on what they did. I see students getting suspensions for being in the hallways, skipping class, using bad language and leaving the premises.

I was 14 and in eighth grade year. A girl tried to pants me – pull down my pants – in science class and ripped my pants. Later that day I retaliated and tried to pants her, which didn't work. She told the principle that I had pulled her pants all the way down. My actions were caught on tape, but hers weren't. The principal came and brought me to the office. He explained that the girl was hurt and that she could press charges if she wanted to. He started to yell at me and tell me I was stupid. I didn't respond and tried to explain what had happened, but there were no cameras to back up what I was saying. Later that day, I was called back into the office and the principal told me I didn't get pantsed and I ripped my jeans myself to get out of the situation. I was worried about getting in trouble. The third time I went down to the office, my dad was there. The principal told me to write a statement and that there would be a hearing. When we got to the hearing, the principal didn't have my statement that told the whole story.

It felt weird to be in IPASS because all of the other students were there for longer times. One person was in for over 100 days. We all sat in the same building with the same teachers. If you have a bad day at IPASS, you might have to repeat a grade. I was separated from the other students at my school. I wasn't allowed to talk to or shake the hands of my friends. If I did, I would be marked as disobedient and have to repeat eighth grade. It felt like jail – it was very scheduled and we were very controlled. We could only go to the restroom two times during the day. It gave me a different point of view. If I had failed, it would have made me feel like I was dumb.

There were only three days left of school when I got out of IPASS. I just had to make sure I went to school so they would transfer my paperwork and graduate onto high school. Because there were so few days left in the year, the principal was threatening people with suspensions because they would just be expelled for the rest of the year.

I think schools need to be sure to look at both sides. Principals should also get to know their students so that everyone has a fair chance.

Antoine Scales

When my son got in trouble, I knew that pantsing had been going on in the school. I also knew that my son's side was on camera and the statement wasn't right, because I had to sign off on the statement. We were told that it was very seldom that both parents come. They checked my son's grades and saw they were good and they didn't have any other problems. They gave him IPASS for 17 days. The school was already so far out of control, so it seemed like the principal just wanted to get some students out to see get control back over the school.

After the 4th day of IPASS, we found out they were filing charges and we had to go to the juvenile court. I had to talk to my son about his court options. We ended up pleading a no contest and doing a restorative justice circle because we felt like we couldn't fight it with the statement and the cameras. Otherwise, he could've been labeled a sex offender.

What hurt me was that people who didn't know my son could make decisions about his future. The rest of his life was in other people's hands who didn't love him or care anything about him. I wondered how things would've turned out if he hadn't had a parent there to advocate for him.

Working in a barber shop, I hear what young people say and I have to let them have a voice. The world is different for young people and it's hard for older people to understand. It's easy to judge young people if you're older when things are changing so quickly. We have to be careful not to judge people. Wearing your pants saggy doesn't mean you're bad. It's just different. We as adults have to be not as stuck in our ways and be understanding of what young people are going through.

This is especially true when there aren't as many opportunities in Columbus Public Schools. In the suburbs, you have access to a lot of activities and avenues – rugby, lacrosse, swimming. In Columbus Public, you have only a couple of things you can do. People make assumptions and stereotypes about my son that they might not make if he lived in the suburbs.