

Additional Input from the initial statement on the witness form.

House Bill 206 raises significant concerns as it grants K-12 superintendents the authority to expel students indefinitely under the vague grounds of "imminent and severe endangerment." This lack of clarity opens the door to unconscious bias, potentially leading to the unjust targeting of Black, Brown, and disabled students. We must recognize that our schools and communities are not immune to such biases, and external pressures can unfairly influence decision-making. Instead of relying on ambiguous punitive measures, perhaps our focus should be directed toward providing crucial support to every student. Neglecting to address underlying issues can have severe long-term consequences for our community. Therefore, we must prioritize proactive, restorative, and inclusive practices, moving away from practices that promote exclusion.

The cumulative impact of a lack of upstream effort or prevention is profound and far-reaching. When we neglect preventative measures, we inadvertently create a "pipeline to prison" system, where the underlying issues of students—such as trauma, mental health issues, and socioeconomic disadvantages—remain unaddressed. Consequently, these students are more likely to disengage, drop out, and possibly enter the juvenile justice system. This 'school-to-prison' pipeline is not only costly for society in terms of financial resources, but it also squanders human potential. By focusing on preventative and restorative measures, we can disrupt this pipeline. It involves investing in mental health support, implementing trauma-informed teaching practices, and providing inclusive, equitable educational opportunities for all students. This proactive approach can help cultivate healthier, safer, and more resilient communities rather than perpetuating a cycle of exclusion and incarceration.

House Bill 206, aimed at improving safety in K-12 schools, suffers from unclear language and potential misuse. This ambiguity threatens unfair targeting and discrimination, especially toward our most vulnerable students. The impact of these decisions goes beyond the individual student, affecting families and entire communities. Expulsion does not solve the underlying issue; it often worsens it, leading to increased distress and challenges for the student, their family, and the community.

Moreover, HB206's focus on immediate punishments instead of long-term solutions feeds into a "pipeline to prison" system. By ignoring students' root challenges, such as trauma, mental health, and socioeconomic disadvantages, we inadvertently push them towards disengagement, higher dropout rates, and potential involvement in the juvenile justice system. This system not only drains societal resources but also wastes immeasurable human potential.

Our students, schools, and communities deserve better. The path forward requires a shift in perspective: from punishment to comprehensive prevention strategies and robust support systems. These strategies should prioritize the student's overall well-being, provide support for schools, and ensure the community remains involved and informed. We can build a more inclusive and resilient educational system by investing in mental health support, implementing trauma-informed teaching practices, and ensuring equal educational opportunities for all. This proactive approach guarantees safer and healthier schools and fosters communities where every individual is valued, supported, and empowered.