

Testimony
In Favor of SB 246
Senate Finance Committee
March 13, 2018

Chair Oelslager, Vice Chair Manning, and members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present background information in support of SB 246, designed to revise student expulsion procedures for young children during the first years of school. I intend to describe the current scientific understanding of the effects on lifelong health of early childhood adversity and, in particular, the effects on academic progress. I will also describe how the current suspension/expulsion discipline strategy may harm children and point to restorative discipline practices as a potential alternative. The following is a summary of the content.

- Early childhood adversity is common. About two of three children have at least one significant, potentially traumatic experience and more than one in five have more three or more.
- Exposure to intra-familial abuse or neglect has a dose-response relationship with health outcome over the life course.
- The mechanisms involved in creating the untoward outcomes—high risk behaviors, functional impairments, disease, and early death—include changes in brain architecture, hormone imbalances, impaired immune function, and difficulty maintaining trusting relationships.
- Exposure to early childhood trauma may lower intellectual ability, decrease school performance, and provoke behavior problems related to inattention and poor impulse control.
- Children with three or more significant adverse experiences are at least three times more likely to fail and six times more likely to have severe behavior problems.
- School problems and youth misbehavior can be misunderstood and criminalized leading to underachievement, early drop-out, and incarceration.
- Exclusionary discipline practices may be harmful to children with disabilities related to exposure to early childhood adversity.
- Exclusionary discipline practices have contributed to disparities related to race, ethnicity, gender and economic level.
- The most important commonality of resilient children is a stable and committed relationship with a supportive adult.
- Restorative practices places relationships at the heart of the educational experience, thereby building resilience and trust.

Respectfully submitted,

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