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Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 246

Eric Seeds, Voices for Ohio's Children

Senate Education Committee

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Chairman Oelslager, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Member Skindell, and members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in favor of Senate Bill 246 and to speak to its impact on our state's children. My name is Eric Seeds and I am the Policy Associate at Voices for Ohio's Children, a statewide, nonpartisan advocacy organization, focused on improving the well-being of children in our state.

Ohio schools suspend 36,000 elementary school students each year. More than 17,000 of these suspensions were for disobedient or disruptive behavior. Statistics also show that 64% of Ohio students suspended from pre-kindergarten to third grade are black students, and 90% of students suspended are from economically disadvantaged households. Senate Bill 246 is a step to address young students who misbehave in school by limiting the circumstances which can lead to suspension or expulsion by instead focusing on positive behavior supports that keep children in school. In addition, this bill also supports school personnel by training them on positive behavior strategies, connecting students with community mental health supports, and a phase in approach to adjust to the changes. The bill will also require data collection and sharing so that best practices can be implemented between schools.

Research clearly indicates that the proper approach to discipline involves moving away from suspension and expulsion and instead keeping students in school, which benefits not only those students, but the broader student body and the community as a whole. Students who are suspended and expelled must stay at home, which can be particularly problematic for young children who may be left unsupervised or whose parents may have to stay home from work to care for them, causing additional stress for the family. Although data is not available on the prevalence of trauma, many young students facing suspension and expulsion may also have been exposed to trauma, which can manifest in students having difficulty focusing or learning, acting out to gain attention, fearing adults, imitating the abuse or trauma they have endured (including verbal abuse), and showing irritability, sadness, and anxiety - signs that can easily be misinterpreted as misbehavior. The new goal should be to manage students' behavior, not just punish.

SB 246 would help to create an environment where schools move away from punitive measures and toward addressing the underlying issues students face to succeed. We believe that this bill is a proactive step toward achieving better outcomes for students.



Thank you for the opportunity to testify and I welcome any questions you may have.

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