

**Jessica Vega Pederson**  
Multnomah County Commissioner

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May 17, 2021

Dear Chair Power & Members of the House Committee on Early Education,

Today I am writing to voice my support for SB 236, which would phase out the use of suspensions and expulsions in publicly-funded early childhood settings.

I support this bill as amended because we know that the impacts of suspensions and expulsions last throughout a child's life and into adulthood. That is particularly true for Black, Brown, and Indigenous children who are suspended and expelled at much higher rates than their white counterparts. Nationwide, young children under the age of 5 years old are expelled at 3 times the rate of K-12 students from state-funded preschool programs. That number rises to more than 13 times the K-12 rate for private and community childcare programs. And if a child is Black, they face an even higher likelihood of suspension and expulsion: while Black children account for less than one-fifth of all preschoolers, they make up almost 50 percent of public preschool suspensions.

We know that these disparities linger into the K-12 years. Locally, a recent report by Portland Public Schools found that Black students accounted for 46.1 percent of all major reported disciplinary actions, while white students made up 5.2 percent. When a child is suspended or expelled from preschool, they experience a trauma that can remain with them for the rest of their lives. They lose critical time in the classroom developing the social, behavioral, and other skills that will serve as the foundation for their K-12 learning experience.

As a community, we need to stop relying on suspensions and expulsions as acceptable disciplinary practices for young children, and start building better solutions that address the root causes of these issues without inflicting long-lasting damage on a young child's development. For too long, early care providers have had to use suspension and expulsion as a last resort because they don't feel that they have any other tools in their toolbox. By eliminating these harsh and detrimental options, we will be able to rise to the challenge of providing better support to both our teachers and children.

I was proud to lead the effort to bring universal, high-quality preschool education to all 3 and 4 year olds in Multnomah County, culminating in the overwhelming approval of the Preschool for All

proposal by Multnomah County voters in November 2020. Over an 18 month period we dove into the complexities of this issue and brought together parents, teachers, community members, and subject matter experts to determine how we design a program that works for all of our children.

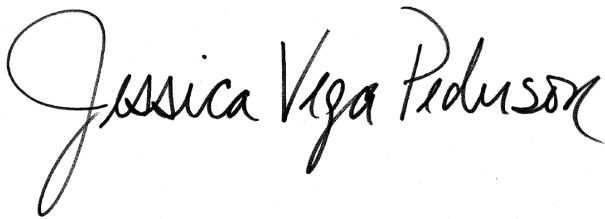
The specific question of suspension and expulsions came up many times in those discussions. Throughout those conversations, parents, and particularly parents of color, were clear that exclusion through suspension or expulsion caused their children to experience learning delays, as well as stigma and shame. We can do better.

In order to adequately enact a policy that bans suspensions and expulsions, we must provide coaching and early childhood supports to ensure child care providers have the resources and information they need to keep children in the classroom. And we heard from parents the need to strengthen proactive and immediate communication between providers and parents when behavioral challenges first arise so they can be addressed early.

By undertaking this decisive, system-wide response we can ensure that communities are no longer limited in their ability to serve all of our children and end a harmful practice that data shows clearly leads to adverse outcomes later in a child's life. Parents, educators, and providers are all ready to do the hard work of building the system we know we need. Let's support them and build the early childhood system our kids deserve.

I urge you to support SB 236.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jessica Vega Pederson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'J'.

Jessica Vega Pederson  
Multnomah County Commissioner, District 3