



Hundreds of Police Chiefs, Sheriffs,
Prosecutors, other Law Enforcement
Leaders, and Violence Survivors
Preventing Crime and Violence

Testimony in Support of HB 2192
Martha Brooks, State Director – Fight Crime: Invest in Kids
Senate Education and Workforce Committee
May 9, 2013

- Chair Hass, Committee Members, good afternoon. My name is Martha Brooks and I am the State Director of Fight Crime: Invest In Kids Oregon. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.
- Fight Crime: Invest in Kids is a bipartisan, nonprofit anti-crime organization comprised of over 5000 police chiefs, sheriffs, district attorneys and victims of violence from across the United States with over 160 members and over 80 associate members in Oregon.
- I am here on behalf of Fight Crime: Invest in Kids to speak in favor of HB 2192 which addresses changes in Oregon's school suspension and expulsion rules.
- You may be wondering why law enforcement leaders are interested in the issue of school climate. I can tell you that our members from across the state are very concerned about the large number of students dropping out of school, and we know that unnecessarily punitive, exclusionary school discipline policies contributes to students disengaging from school and failing to graduate.
- **Today, schools across the country are suspending and expelling students more often than ever before.** As you can see in our Oregon report being released today, *Classmates not Cellmates*, **Oregon schools issued over 88,000 suspensions during the 2011-2012 school year** (approximately half are out of school suspensions). To put that number in to perspective, last year, Oregon expelled approximately the number of students it would take to fill 44 of our largest high schools with an average student population of 2,000 students. Stunning. An over half of these suspensions were for non-violent, non-drug related incidents.
- While it is imperative to keep weapons and violence out of our schools, over-reliance on harsh discipline policies, especially in cases where student conduct does not pose a safety threat, can be counter-productive when it removes struggling students from educational opportunities, making them more likely to dropout and eventually turn to crime.
- When students are suspended for minor discipline issues, for using inappropriate language, or for other behavior that is distracting or disruptive but falls short of a safety threat, we need to figure out how best to address the root problem behind student misconduct without interrupting students' educational progress.



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- **Consider these findings:**
 - **Students who are arrested in school are two times more likely to drop out of school;**
 - **Students who are sent to court because of an in-school arrest are four times more likely to drop out;**
 - **Students who are suspended three or more times by their sophomore year are five times more likely to drop out;**
 - **When a student drops out, he or she becomes eight times more likely to end up in jail or prison than his peers who stayed in school.**

- As the research shows, arrests, suspensions, and expulsions all disrupt learning for students who need more, not less, time on academics. These education interruptions make these students more likely to drop out, get arrested, and end up in jail, creating what some call the **“school-to-prison pipeline”**.
 - A recent study of Texas students found that, for students with similar profiles, those with one or more suspensions or expulsions were 5 times more likely to drop out—and 6 times more likely to repeat a grade level—than students with no disciplinary actions.
 - And it found that **students with one or more suspensions or expulsions were more than 11 times more likely to have contact with the juvenile justice system.**
 - Even students with **minimal disciplinary troubles**—those with just one disciplinary action for a relatively minor “discretionary” offense—were **nearly 3 times more likely to have contact with the juvenile justice system** within a year.

- According to the US Department of Education, Oregon has the fourth-worst high school graduation rate in the nation, graduating just 68 percent of our kids from high school in 2011 in four years. With Oregon’s current dropout crisis – we face a serious public safety concern. If, through common sense school discipline policies that help pull in rather than push out troubled students, we can improve graduation rates by 10 percentage points, we would see a 20 percent decrease in murders and aggravated assaults here in Oregon.

- This is why it is clear to Fight Crime: Invest in Kids members that we must address the school suspension and expulsion rules, make them more consistent not only across the state, but within individual school districts and end the **“school-to-prison pipeline.”**



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- Before I talk specifically about solutions and the role that law enforcement plays, I would like to talk a bit about youth development, in particular, adolescent development, and the nuances and complexity of working with youth who, unlike adults, possess a formative mind and must be worked with accordingly.
- Some of you may have seen the October 2011 **National Geographic** article on the adolescent brain.

<http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2011/10/teenage-brains/dobbs-text>

Science confirms what law enforcement and parents know: teens are prone to risk-taking and sensation seeking; adolescent brains are not fully developed until close to the age of 25, and now researchers are saying that this is actually an adaptive response, providing adolescents with the openness, flexibility, and excitement about the new and unknown that are adaptive and necessary at this time in a person's life. When working with youth, we have an incredible opportunity to make a powerful, lasting impact and help transform them into responsible, law-abiding young adults. But to do so, we must respond appropriately, providing them with models of positive behavior and setting clear expectations.

- This is particularly important for those students for whom school is often the only place where they are positively connected and positively influenced. Older students especially will not stay in school if their school environment is not supportive, culturally relevant, and engaging in ways that meet their social and emotional needs. Otherwise, these kids may turn to gangs or other negative influences and end up as criminal perpetrators and victims.
- There are many positive, effective ways to address misconduct and school discipline issues, which require a multidisciplinary, whole community approach. Common sense school discipline policies create a positive culture, keep kids in school, and address the root causes of student misconduct, thus improving school climates and making our communities safer places for all.
- **For starters**, it is important to **re-frame how we think about 'discipline.'** Rather than being a punishment as a consequence to a behavior, an effective culture of positive discipline comes through an upstream solution – creating, teaching and constantly reinforcing clear, consistent behavioral expectations for all students, and intervening when necessary.
- **School Wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports** has seen great results in schools across the country, and has already been adopted by 13,000



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- schools across the country. This 3-tiered approach to discipline begins with prevention. Districts, administrators, schools, and teachers clearly define and teach behavioral expectations, rewarding positive behavior and providing a continuum of possible consequences for problem behavior. At-risk students are provided target interventions that are consistent with school-wide behavioral expectations. Students with more serious behavioral problems are provided more intense, individualized intervention, often with family and community involvement.
[PBIS has been implemented in many Oregon schools.]
- Prevention can also begin far earlier than the adolescent years, such as with the **Good Behavior Game**. This little known strategy is implemented with first-graders and has proven to reap huge long-term benefits. This intervention trains school staff to identify and publicize desired student behavior, post rules, and reinforce students' positive behavior. A rigorous study of The Good Behavior Game found that kids left out of this 1st grade intervention were remarkably, by 11th grade, 250% more likely to have been suspended from school than students who participated in the intervention.
- Everyone in this room knows that when children act out, there are often multiple underlying causes, not just one. That is why we believe that the best approach is a **collaborative, multi-disciplinary, multi-agency approach**. Schools, police officers, social workers, courts, families, and the community should all work together and share information about student needs to get the best outcomes for kids.
- Law enforcement has long supported a balanced strategy to keep our streets safe - prevention, intervention and enforcement all have value. Public safety largely depends on kids getting a quality education in the classroom instead of on the streets. Interventions and non-punitive forms of addressing school discipline are essential to this strategy and especially effective because they help young people learn from their mistakes and develop the skills they need so that they have every opportunity to be successful in the future.
- **This bill is so important because research and years of experience show that keeping kids in school is the best way to prevent crime. HB 2192 is essential to help keep kids in school, on track, and out of trouble. On behalf of law enforcement leaders across the nation, we encourage you to support and pass HB 2192.**