

# Youth, Rights & Justice

ATTORNEYS AT LAW

## Support SB 553-A and Keep Our Youngest Students in School

### *Let's Stop the School-to-Prison Pipeline at the Source!*

**The Problem:** Oregon schools suspended nearly 8,000 elementary school (K-5) students in the 2013-14 school year. Over 70% were suspended for "disruptive behavior" and other minor infractions. Students who are already vulnerable and marginalized are more likely to be excluded from school. This includes students with disabilities, students from low income families, students of color, students in foster care, and others.

Suspension and expulsion are the most serious and drastic forms of discipline that schools have at their disposal, and they do not teach young students problem-solving skills and better behavior. For our youngest students, these drastic measures should be used only for behavior that causes serious harm or poses a direct and serious risk.

**A Better Way:** SB 553-A will prevent schools from excluding K-5 students for minor infractions and for **behavior that is developmentally normal**, such as being noisy or otherwise disrupting the class. Schools can continue to use many other strategies (including in-school suspension) to improve student behavior while keeping students in school and learning.

Among the reasons why out-of-school suspension and expulsion are particularly inappropriate for younger students:

- Children **lose vital early instruction time**, including **basic reading and math** skills which form the foundation for learning.
- Numerous studies show that **suspension/exclusion doesn't improve school safety or academic achievement**. There is evidence that it may make schools less safe and reduce test scores and academic progress for all students.
- Excluding young children from school places them in harm's way. School is the safe place for them to be during the day.
- Parents whose children are excluded will likely have to miss work and risk losing wages and their jobs.

The "School-to-Prison Pipeline" and disparities in discipline start in the earliest grades, with suspensions for minor, non-violent behaviors. SB 553-A will help put generations of students in Oregon on a better path to be more successful in school and in life!

We urge your YES vote on SB 553-A!

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401 NE 19TH Ave., Suite 200 • Portland, OR 97232 • (503) 232-2540, F: (503) 231-4767 • youthrightsjustice.org