

Dear Chair Smith Warner, Vice Chairs Drazan and Holvey, and Members of the Committee.

My name is Christine Maltez and I am writing in support of SB 236 to eliminate suspensions and expulsions in early childhood programs.

I am a primary ages 3-6 teacher that has worked in the early childhood field for four years. As a teacher who has received specialized coaching from MECP behavioral specialists to support a child with disabilities and challenging behavior, I cannot stress enough how important it is to have both the coaching resources, and the time to implement them. During the school year, this four year old child came very close to being expelled from the center because of their challenging behavior, and increasing pressure from the other families in the classroom. Thankfully, I was able to convince the school administrator to delay the decision until after we work with a behavioral specialist. We then worked with MECP Behavioral Specialists to develop a support plan for the child, their family, and the teachers, and over the course of six months, we saw positive changes to the student's behavior which allowed the student to integrate into the classroom and make friends for the first time. The support plan set in place ensured that the child was receiving the appropriate responses and guidance from the teachers at school and the parents at home. Not only did the child's behavior improve at school, but their parents also saw improvements at home, which encouraged them to seek more services for their child outside of school. The entire process of receiving coaching was incredibly supportive and I felt comfortable in using the tools I learned with the child and with the rest of the classroom, who also benefited from it as well.

In contrast to that experience, I have also worked in a large preschool center where the student demographic was majority Black and Latino, and where suspension and expulsion was the norm. The teachers had no support or access to resources or tools to support these children and were often left to fend for themselves. Not only were the teachers frustrated at this broken system, so were the parents in that community, who were exhausted by the lack of options for their child and became exceedingly distrustful of the program. That should not happen. The point of any educational program is to be able to serve all students, regardless of their challenges, and we should not punish them for our failures to do so.

When teachers, administrators and parents fail to observe, listen, and appropriately respond to a child exhibiting challenging behavior, what we're really doing is ignoring the child's cry for help, and disregarding potential signs of more serious learning disabilities that need to be addressed and supported. In Oregon, we have the privilege of resources like the MECP Behavioral Specialists that offer support plans that work for teachers, parents, and above all the child. But these plans will not get implemented if the child is expelled and pushed from school to school, further traumatizing them and exacerbating existing challenges. When a child needs help, you should put more resources in, not take them away.

I support SB 236 because I believe it was created to support the children and their families, and can help grow the valuable resources available to all children in need, which can improve the early childhood education programs in our state. This also includes resources for smaller in-home programs, who currently have inequitable access to these resources.

Thank you for your time.

Christine Maltez