

February 19, 2021

Senator M. Dembrow, Chair; Senator C. Thomsen, Vice-Chair; and the Members of the Senate Committee on Education:

Re: Studying and Eliminating Early Childhood Suspensions and Expulsions

Greetings,

My name is Elizabeth Buscho; I am a Special Education Teacher from Portland, Oregon. I currently consult, teach, and serve on the early childhood evaluation team in Vancouver, Washington.

It is my pleasure to write this letter of recommendation in support of SB 236 which seeks to study and eliminate the suspension and expulsion of young children ages 0-5 from early care and education programs, which research specifically indicates disproportionately and significantly affects Black, Brown, Indigenous and Native, and children with disabilities.

Prior to receiving certification as a Special Education Teacher, I worked in a specialized position for Multnomah Early Childhood Program (MECP) as a Community Instructional Assistant. This position gave me the opportunity to work with a wide variety of children across multiple settings. I provided support in many different preschools, including: Head Start programs (Albina, Portland and Mt. Hood), private community preschools, and MECP's Early Childhood Special Education Classrooms.

During my tenure at MECP, my position offered the unique opportunity and experience of receiving culturally and developmentally extensive, relevant, and responsive training and coaching from related service providers. I often worked independently to provide the necessary support for children while in consultation with the Service Coordinator. My ultimate role and responsibility ensured the classroom team had adequate knowledge, intentional teaching strategies, and significant skills to continue to implement the appropriate interventions in order for the child to be successful and stay in their least restrictive placement. I worked with the child and then consulted, trained and coached the staff these same strategies to increase their skills as the team worked together to develop a long-term plan for success.

In that time, classroom staff noticed capacity increasing with proper resources and tools, training, and coaching, that enhanced the child's positive learning experiences and fostered their mental, social-emotional, and academic needs.

Since receiving certification and as a Special Education Teacher on the early childhood education team, I receive referrals from early care, education programs, and families that indicate implicit and screening measure bias, insufficient and limited pre-service and in-service training, resources, and tools to support children of various needs impacting their development (e.g. racial trauma, domestic violence, homelessness, food insecurity, health care disparities). Such programs have suspended, expelled, or withheld enrollment with the contingent request for special education and related services. Research indicates special education services have been weaponized as another form of racial discrimination and segregation. Black, Brown, Indigenous, and Native children are

disproportionately and significantly referred for more minor infractions or similar behaviors than their non-BIPOC peers.

All children deserve to learn and thrive alongside their peers, and in doing so classroom early care and education teachers need to have the high-quality, research- and evidence-based practices that legislation demands and accounts them to encompass. With investment from SB 236, my first hand account can be replicated to reach more early care and education program providers and design and implement a transformative and liberative education system that encourages teaming, capacity building, and innovative inclusionary, strengths-based skills, and equitable practices that successfully supports children and their families.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my experience.

With regards,

Elizabeth Buscho
Special Education Teacher