



January 24, 2023

Minnesota Senate Education Finance Committee
3209 Minnesota Senate Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Kunesh and Members of the Senate Education Finance Committee:

Legal Aid appreciates the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of SF69, which would limit dismissals for Minnesota students in grades kindergarten through third grade. This bill is a critical step to ensuring that young learners in Minnesota have full access to school and the supports they need to be successful in school. Suspensions are not helpful for young learners and disproportionately impact Black, Indigenous, and students of color, and students who have disabilities.

Young students who present with behaviors at school that are seen as necessitating dismissal or punishment are actually in need of support. These behaviors that lead to dismissals are almost always the student's way of expressing their unmet needs. The student is most often demonstrating that they cannot handle the stress they are experiencing at school and they do not have access to appropriate coping skills.

What students need in these circumstances is support in order to build more appropriate coping skills and to be able to use them in the school environment. A thoughtful response from a caring, trusted adult in the building can be far more effective than removing students from the school in these situations. Removals can make behaviors worse because they communicate to the student that the student does not belong in school and that school isn't a place that can help them learn how to handle being overwhelmed.

Being suspended at a young age has devastating long-term consequences, including a far higher risk of academic failure, early exit from high school, and incarceration.

Racial disparities in the use of suspensions at these young ages drive disparities in educational outcomes throughout students' careers and lives. Students who have challenging behaviors at school need more support, not to be excluded from their supportive learning environments.

Limiting the use of suspensions for young learners would be a tremendous move to ensure that young Minnesotans experience belonging and success in school environments during their foundational years in school. We support this important effort and are grateful for the leadership of Rep. Richardson in advancing this key issue on behalf of Minnesota's young learners.

Thank you for your leadership on behalf of Minnesota's students and for considering this important step to address racial disparities in Minnesota's schools and to ensure that Minnesotans have full access to school from a young age.

Sincerely,

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