



May 3, 2021

The Honorable Representative Joseph M. McNamara  
Chair of the House Education Committee  
82 Smith Street  
Providence, RI 02903

Re: House Bill 5933 - Reducing Out-of-School Suspensions

Dear Chairman McNamara and Members of the Committee:

The Mental Health Association supports House Bill 5933, aimed at reducing out-of-school suspensions by increasing the availability of alternative in-school programs and classroom spaces. We thank Representative Ranglin-Vassall for this legislation. This bill will counter the school-to-prison pipeline, decreasing the number of students of color, in particular, who end up incarcerated later in life. It will also prevent negative impacts on students and their mental health.

**Some facts to consider:**

- Nationally, students of color are suspended at a rate three times greater than white students.<sup>1</sup>
- In Rhode Island public schools in 2015, Black students comprised over 16% of school suspensions despite only comprising 8% of the total school population.<sup>2</sup>
- A higher suspension rate in a school can increase a child's likelihood of being incarcerated later in life by 15 to 20%.<sup>3</sup>

Decreasing out-of-school suspensions has the potential for many positive outcomes. First, it ensures that students are able to get back on track with their academics at a faster rate, as they are able to return to the classroom quicker. As a result, academic success is higher and drop-out rates decrease for students who do not face out-of-school suspensions. Not only this, but students are less likely to become involved in the juvenile justice system and, later in life, the criminal justice system, a circumstance that is noted above to impact students of color more than white students.<sup>4</sup> In fact, in one study it was found that “while Black students represent 16% of student enrollment,

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.ri.edu/news/Pages/Disrupting-the-School-to-Prison-Pipeline.aspx>

<sup>2</sup> <https://riaclu.org/en/publications/report-school-prison-pipeline-black-white-february-2015>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/uk/19/09/school-discipline-linked-later-consequences>

<sup>4</sup> <https://edsources.org/2019/in-school-suspensions-the-answer-to-school-discipline-not-necessarily-experts-say/619083>

they represent 27% of students referred to law enforcement and 31% of students subjected to a school-related arrest,” a factor that limited out-of-school suspensions can prevent.<sup>5</sup>

Additionally, out-of-school suspensions often impact students with mental health conditions more than their peers. To begin with, students who have mental health conditions or learning conditions are more likely to face suspensions compared to their peers.<sup>6</sup> Further, a lack of mental health support in schools increases the out-of-school suspension rate,<sup>7</sup> and it often leaves students with mental health conditions both without support and suspended more frequently.<sup>8</sup> By reducing suspensions, specifically out-of-school suspensions, these negative effects can be avoided.

Thank you for your consideration. Please feel free to contact us if you have any questions.

Respectfully,



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CC: Members of the House Committee on Education  
Rep. Ranlgin-Vassall

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<sup>5</sup> <https://childmind.org/report/2016-childrens-mental-health-report/suspension-zero-tolerance/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://childmind.org/report/2016-childrens-mental-health-report/suspension-zero-tolerance/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/pediatrics/112/5/1206.full.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.sharedjustice.org/domestic-justice/2017/12/5/mental-health-and-the-school-to-prison-pipeline>