

Dear Chairwoman Cano and Members of the Senate Education Committee:

As organizations that advocate for racial justice, disability rights, and school environments which center autonomy and equity for all students, we strongly urge your support for S 189, sponsored by Senator Ana Quezada. This legislation critically would restrict the ability for a school to issue out-of-school suspensions to our youngest and most vulnerable students, and it would hold school districts accountable to conscientiously examine any evident disparities on the basis of race or disability in their suspension rates.

Our organizations know that punitive approaches to school punishment, and especially exclusion from the classroom at a young age, can only perpetuate the school-to-prison pipeline. The social, educational, and psychological costs of unnecessary suspensions are simply too great for the wellbeing of both the individual student and the student body. Studies have consistently shown that “suspending students does little to reduce future misbehavior for the disciplined students or their peers, nor did it result in improved academic achievement for peers or perceptions of positive school climate.”<sup>1</sup>

The data for Rhode Island public schools are especially troubling. They show that a significant number of students are given out-of-school suspensions for such minor misconduct as “disrespect”; that marginalized students – and particularly Black students, multi-racial students, Native American students, Hispanic students, and students with disabilities – are disproportionately suspended at disturbing rates; and that suspensions for the youngest children – including even kindergarteners – are doled out at extraordinarily high rates.

Addressing the toll of out-of-school suspensions requires that we take a student-first, restorative approach to reforming school policies and the school environment. It also necessitates immediate action to ensure both that we are not exacerbating racial disparities and disparities for students with disabilities in our school systems, and that we are not introducing our youngest students to these punitive and harmful experiences before they even learn how to read. For these reasons, we strongly urge this committee to pass S 189.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Chanda Womack

**Alliance of Rhode Island Southeast Asians for Education**

Hannah Stern

**American Civil Liberties Union of Rhode Island**

Harrison Tuttle

**Black Lives Matter RI PAC**

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nea.org/advocating-for-change/new-from-nea/school-suspensions-do-more-harm-good>

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