

Testimony Regarding
S.B. 1023: An Act Concerning the Provision of Alternative Educational Opportunities for Expelled Students by Boards of Education

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Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, Senator Berthel, Representative McCarty, and esteemed members of the Education Committee:

We are testifying today on behalf of Connecticut Voices for Children, a research-based child advocacy organization working to ensure that all Connecticut children have an equitable opportunity to achieve their full potential. Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony regarding S.B. 1023: An Act Concerning the Provision of Alternative Educational Opportunities for Expelled Students by Boards of Education. **S.B. 1023 would remove the Standards for Educational Opportunities for Students who have been Expelled, which Connecticut Voices for Children opposes. S.B. 1023 would also expand the number of students who may benefit from receiving education in an alternative setting while expelled, which Connecticut Voices for Children supports.**

Connecticut Voices for Children believes that every child deserves robust educational opportunities so that they develop the skills and knowledge needed to pursue their career goals and contribute to their communities. When children show signs of struggling in school, they are less able to access educational opportunities and to develop their skills at an optimal pace. In some cases, children demonstrate that they are struggling in school through acting out behaviors such as those that may result in expulsion from school settings.¹ When a child demonstrates that he or she is struggling to learn in a traditional educational setting, it is incumbent upon educators to create different educational opportunities that may better support these children toward a path of success.

Over the years, Connecticut has moved closer to creating an educational system that supports children who struggle in traditional settings. In 2017, the Connecticut General Assembly voted into statute provisions guaranteeing a minimum standard of alternative education for students during expulsions.² Within Section 3 of this act, the Legislature mandated that the State Department of Education (SDE) develop a set of standards guiding the provision of alternative educational opportunity including the kind of instruction and number of hours students should receive while enrolled in these settings. SDE developed these standards³ through an extensive multi-stakeholder process, and the State Board of Education unanimously adopted the standards.⁴

The Standards for Educational Opportunities for Children who have been Expelled dictates that districts must provide expelled students with a full-time, comprehensive educational experience that is tailored to the individual needs of struggling students and allows students to progress toward graduation. It provides a set of steps Local Education Agencies (LEAs) must take after students are expelled to ensure that families are involved in educational planning for expelled students, students' special education needs are met while students are expelled, and parents and students understand their rights during the expulsion process. It also mandates that alternative education placement settings are responsible to develop an individualized learning plan (ILP) for expelled students to inform and direct the student's learning goals and activities for the duration of the expulsion.

S.B. 1023 repeals and replaces section (d) of section 10-233d of the general statutes, and in so doing, it nullifies standards adopted by the state two years ago regarding family engagement, individual learning planning, and activities that must be offered to expelled students. **Connecticut Voices for Children opposes nullifying these standards because these standards ensure that students struggling in their home schools can access robust, individualized educational smaller and more individualized school settings.**

Additionally, in repealing and replacing section (d) of section 10-233d of the general statutes, S.B. 1023 would expand the number of students who are offered an alternative educational opportunity during their period of expulsion, which Connecticut Voices for Children supports. Currently, section 10-233d of the general statutes mandates that “any pupil expelled for the first time who is between the ages of sixteen and eighteen and who wishes to continue his or her educational shall be offered an alternative educational opportunity....A local or regional board of education shall count the expulsion of a pupil when he was under sixteen years of age for purposes of determining whether an alternative educational opportunity when he is between the ages of sixteen and eighteen.”⁵ This equates to a “two-strikes and you're out” policy for youth over the age of fifteen.

S.B. 1023 would change this policy to one that offers an alternative educational opportunity to all students who are expelled, regardless of previous expulsions. For students who are aged 18 or older, S.B. 1023 would allow ~~for~~ districts to offer these students placement in adult education programs without being required to withdraw from school. We encourage the Legislature to clarify this language to ensure that students age 18 or older can access either an alternative education program or an adult education program because in some instances, particularly those of students with special education needs, an alternative education program may be the best educational setting for young adults. **Connecticut Voices for Children supports expanding alternative educational opportunities for expelled students regardless of previous expulsions. Adolescents often learn best through making mistakes⁶—even big mistakes—and while mistakes should have consequences, they should not remove pathways toward success in adulthood.**

Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony regarding S.B. 1023. We can be reached with any questions at (203)498-4240 or lruth@ctvoices.org, wsimmons@ctvoices.org, and chudson@ctvoices.org.

¹ Casillas, A., Robbins, S., Allen, J., Kuo, Y. L., Hanson, M. A., & Schmeiser, C. (2012). Predicting early academic failure in high school from prior academic achievement, psychosocial characteristics, and behavior. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 104*(2), 407-420. Retrieved from: <https://laringsmiljosenteret.uis.no/getfile.php/13308255/L%C3%A6ringsmilj%C3%B8senteret/Pdf/Psykisk%20helse/Predicting%20early%20academic%20failure%20in%20high%20school%20from%20prior%20academic%20achievement.pdf>

² An Act Concerning Education Mandate Relief, Public Act 17-220 (2017). Retrieved from: <https://www.cga.ct.gov/2017/ACT/pa/pdf/2017PA-00220-R00HB-07276-PA.pdf>

³ Standards for Educational Opportunities for Students Who Have Been Expelled. Connecticut State Department of Education. Retrieved from: <https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Publications/Standards-for-Educational-Opportunities-for-Students-Who-Have-Been-Expelled/Standards-for-Alternative-Educational-Opportunities>

⁴ Connecticut State Board of Education Meeting Minutes (2018, January 3). Retrieved from: https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Board/Minutes2018/Minutes_SBE_010318.pdf?la=en

⁵ Expulsion of Pupils, CT Stat. §§10-233d (Supp. 2017).

⁶ Pickhardt, C. (2013). *Surviving your child's adolescence: How to understand, and even enjoy, the rocky road to independence*. John Wiley & Sons.