



An Act to Support  
Healthy Development Among  
Preschoolers  
HD 2352 & SD 1550  
Rep. Balser & Sen. DiDomenico

---

Early childcare expulsion and suspension

An expulsion early in life can have lasting impact on a child's educational and life outcomes; a young child who is suspended or expelled is 10 times more likely to drop out of high school, experience academic failure and grade retention, hold negative school attitudes, and face incarcerations if they are expelled or suspended at a young age compared to those students who are not. The impact of exclusionary discipline is felt disproportionately by young boys generally, and black and Hispanic boys in particular, as they are expelled and suspended at significantly higher rates than other children.<sup>i</sup> Research indicates that the impact of suspension and expulsion on toddlers is twofold; the experience of exclusion from the school environment negatively impacts cognitive, social and emotional development and can inhibit identification of underlying issues including mental health conditions, undiagnosed disabilities and or traumatic experiences including abuse or neglect.

Despite this knowledge, rates of suspension and expulsion among preschoolers remain unacceptably high. Nationally the rate of expulsion of preschoolers is 3 times higher than rates of expulsion in grades K-12. A 2005 study by the Foundation for Child Development at Yale University ranked Massachusetts ninth in the rate of preschool expulsion. Out of 185 preschool teachers in Massachusetts, over 39% reported having expelled at least one preschool aged student over the past 12 months and 15% reported suspending a student.<sup>ii</sup> The Department of Early Education and Care has, with severely limited resources, provided some access to tools and supports to reduce suspension and expulsion. However, a more comprehensive strategy is needed and must begin with establishment of a clear set of standards for all early education programs.

About this bill

In keeping with the joint policy recommendations of the US Departments of Health and Human Services and Education and the recently revised Head Start Program regulations, this bill requires the Department of Early Education and Care to issue performance specifications aimed at:

- setting goals for substantially restricting the use of suspension and expulsion
- ensuring that use of exclusion policies when necessary is free of bias and discrimination
- encouraging early education programs to access assistance to improve teacher skills and support individual children and their families to address behavioral health concerns without use of exclusionary disciplinary practices.

For more information on this bill or on the Children's Mental Health Campaign

please contact Courtney Chelo at [cchelo@mspcc.org](mailto:cchelo@mspcc.org) or 617-587-1513

3815 Washington Street, Jamaica Plain, MA 02130 | [www.childrensmentalhealthcampaign.org](http://www.childrensmentalhealthcampaign.org)

## Bill text

An Act to support healthy development among preschoolers

*Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Court assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:*

SECTION 1. [Chapter 15D](#) of the General Laws is hereby amended in Section 11 subsection (c) by inserting after the words “best practices in the field of early education and care the following: On or before January 1 2018, the Department shall develop performance specification standards for prohibiting or severely limiting the use of suspension and expulsion for use only as a last resort in extraordinary circumstances where there is a serious safety threat that cannot be reduced or eliminated by the provision of reasonable program modifications.

The standards shall at minimum include 1) benchmarks and goals for supporting children’s social emotional and behavioral development to include reducing the use of exclusion as a disciplinary tool and for eliminating disparities in the use of suspension and expulsion 2) engagement steps to be taken with the child and parent or guardian prior to suspension or expulsion 3) requirements for communicating discipline policies including suspension and expulsion policies to staff, families and community partners. 4) specifications for achieving performance standards which, reward and incentivize programs to access technical assistance to support ongoing development of staff and teacher skills for supporting children’s social emotional and behavioral development, reducing disparities and limiting the use of suspension and expulsion.

---

i U.S. Department of Education Policy Statement on Expulsion and Suspension Policies in Early Childhood Settings. (2014). Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services U.S. Department of Education Policy Statement on Expulsion and Suspension Policies in Early Childhood Settings <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/school-discipline/policy-statement-ec-expulsions-suspensions.pdf>

ii Gilliam, Walter S. PhD. (2005). *Prekindergarteners Left Behind: Expulsion Rates in State Prekindergarten Programs*. (FCD Policy Brief Series No.3) New Haven, CT: Foundation for Child Development. [http://ziglercenter.yale.edu/publications/National%20Prek%20Study\\_expulsion%20brief\\_244593\\_123099\\_5379.pdf](http://ziglercenter.yale.edu/publications/National%20Prek%20Study_expulsion%20brief_244593_123099_5379.pdf)

**For more information on this bill or on the Children’s Mental Health Campaign**

**please contact Courtney Chelo at [cchelo@mspcc.org](mailto:cchelo@mspcc.org) or 617-587-1513**

**3815 Washington Street, Jamaica Plain, MA 02130 | [www.childrensmentalhealthcampaign.org](http://www.childrensmentalhealthcampaign.org)**