

**Re: HB19-1194**

Dear Education Committee and Madam Chair;

I represent the Arc of the Central Mountains serving 4 counties: Garfield, Pitkin, Eagle and Lake including 6 Rural School Districts. The Mission of the Arc includes "...actively supports their (people with intellectual and developmental disabilities) full *inclusion and participation* in the community throughout their lifetimes."

The majority of the work the Arc of the Central Mountains does on a day to day basis consists of Educational Advocacy in all 6 of our school districts. I am deeply concerned with a growing trend of discipline in the form of suspension and expulsion taking place for younger and younger students. Consequences to behaviors do not function the same way for the majority of children with disabilities. The behavior being demonstrated is not rooted in intentional mischief. Just a couple of examples; in one kindergarten, a student with autism was suspended for pulling a fire alarm in the hallway. Please remember the literal nature of an autistic brain...the child said "pull" and so he did. In another case, a student with autism and significant ADHD was expelled from two school districts and in his 3rd facing more suspensions by the time he was 7, for continual class disruptions and behavioral issues. Both of these students were on Individualized Education Programs (IEP) as they had been determined eligible for services in school. The inconsistencies of living in a "Local Control State" as Colorado is, makes it extremely difficult to navigate the systems of discipline being adhered to. SB19-1194 will provide useful guidelines for all school district to adhere to when dealing with potential discipline resulting in suspension/expulsion. If this Bill had been passed much sooner, our fire alarm pulling kindergarten student would not have missed crucial days at school.

When children are removed from a classroom and a school building through suspension/expulsion, they lose valuable academic instruction and support time. The academic lessons being taught within the classroom will never be recreated in the same way. The loss of that opportunity may never be regained. The ages of 3yr to 7yr are particularly important for students; not only for academics but also the total educational experience including the natural support and learning opportunities provided by their own peers. In other words, from a behavioral perspective, children learn best from the positive behaviors modeled by other children...their own peers.



Data and research show that a high number of children who are disciplined in school through suspensions and expulsions will likely repeat behaviors which could trigger more of these suspensions in the future. Simply removing children from the environment does not rehabilitate the behavior in most cases. Concurrently, these students may continue to lose precious time learning the academics and find themselves falling behind potentially causing anxiety and more behaviors...a vicious cycle.

Specific to children with disabilities being supported by an IEP through the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA); these students have been found eligible for the IEP because it has been determined that they require additional supports, related services, accommodations and modifications due to a disability. It is also standard practice to provide the Least Restrictive Environment for learning which should always be inclusive with other students. When a young child is removed from school, they lose critical opportunities for learning both academically and socially. All students found eligible for an IEP have the right to a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). When students are not in school, they are not receiving this vital education.

To Representatives Lontine and Larson, Senators Priola and Fields; thank you for sponsoring this very important Bill. For many of the children the Arc advocates for, the school environment is the only structured support they are provided in a consistent way.

Many thanks to the Rural Alliance, CASB, CASE and The Arc Chapters in Colorado and others for your continued work to pass this very important Bill.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jill D. Pidcock".

Jill Pidcock
Interim Executive Director
Arc of the Central Mountains
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