

**Testimony before the Joint Committee on Education for House Bill No. 00177
and House Bill No. 00178**

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Student Representative on the Boston School Committee, SY '11- '12.

I would like to thank the Joint Committee on Education for considering these two very important pieces of legislation. My name is Carlos Rojas Alvarez, I have been a resident of Boston since the age of five. Come this June, I will be graduating from the Boston Latin School and will consider myself a product of the Boston Public Schools, which I have been a part of, virtually, my entire life.

I come here today as a proud member of the Boston Student Advisory Council, or BSAC, for short, and Youth on Board. We are a youth led group devoted to improving the quality of education in the Boston public high schools by affecting change in educational policy. As a group that strives to empower high school students, it is of vital importance to us that students across Boston and the state of Massachusetts are not only given the opportunity to graduate high school, but to engage in successful college studies in the pursuit of a rewarding life.

That, unfortunately, is easier said than done. In order to help students reach their fullest potential here in Massachusetts, and I'm sure you've heard this countless times, we **have** to work tirelessly to keep kids in school, reduce the drop-out rates, and find viable ways to monitor the progress of individual schools with respect to retention and graduation, we have to identify the strengths and weaknesses in their exclusionary practices and, most importantly, act upon overly harsh exclusionary practices, which have closed so many doors of opportunity for students here in Massachusetts and the rest of the country. The degree to which zero-tolerance policies have been taken are, frankly, monstrous. I don't mean to be clichéd, but we've waited far too long and it's time for change.

BSAC would like to see each school in the state have to submit, by law, annual reports on their disciplinary practices, would like to see the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education **analyze** the exclusion data and, again, most importantly, **act upon** that data. Perhaps Investigating schools with unusually high exclusion and drop-out rates, helping those schools adopt successful models and allocating greater resources for guidance support in such schools would be helpful ways of making use of that data.

In a legislative system where a student will lose his or her right to a public education after being expelled from any public school, the BSAC would like to see all other alternatives **exhausted**, and I mean worked over and chewed over and over, before any permanent exclusionary measures are taken. BSAC would like to see the students of Massachusetts treated like human beings—human beings who deal with

behavioral problems for a number of reasons, many of which they have no control over. We would like to see **second chances**.

In a legislative system where students are being excluded from school for unreasonable and unwarranted amounts of time, excluded for minor offenses which may require nothing more than simple restorative actions, excluded for reasons that are vaguely, if at all, explained by the decision-maker, BSAC would like to see those decision-makers **have** to determine that:

- the evidence against a student show that the student committed the offense

- that there is a substantial possibility that the misconduct will happen again

and

- that the student's continued presence in school would have a considerably harmful effect on the general welfare of the school and its students.

For these reasons, the Boston Student Advisory Council gives its unwavering support to House No. 00177: An Act to Respond to School Exclusion Data and Reduce School Dropouts

and

House No. 00178: An Act Relative to Students' Access to Educational Services and Exclusion from School.

We strongly urge you to approve these two bills which will undoubtedly contribute to greater student success across all districts of Massachusetts. Thank you so much for your time.