



**LAWYERS' COMMITTEE FOR CIVIL RIGHTS
UNDER LAW OF THE BOSTON BAR ASSOCIATION**

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H: 3435 An Act To Help Students Stay In School
Testimony of Norma D'Apolito
Lawyers' Committee For Civil Rights

My name is Norma D'Apolito and I am the Executive Director of the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights in Boston. I am here today in support of HB 3435.

The Lawyers' Committee has been in existence for 46 years and for all that time our mission has been to address problems of race and national origin discrimination. Our clients include children of color, not just in Boston, but throughout the entire state of Massachusetts.

As advocates for these children, we have been deeply concerned about racial disparities in the application of school discipline for a long time. In particular, we have been disturbed by repeated reports of Black and Latino students being punished more often and more harshly than other students.

The figures submitted earlier today sadly confirm that the percentage of Black and Latino students suspended for over ten days was greater than twice the percentage of Black and Latino Students enrolled in the Massachusetts public schools. These are truly disturbing statistics.

Exclusion from school can and does have devastating consequences on the lives of so many children. Children who are suspended even for a short time and certainly those who are excluded multiple times and for longer periods fall behind in their work and are at greater risk of dropping out and, ultimately, of going to prison.

I have been a public interest lawyer for my whole career. In total, I have spent twenty years in Boston, New York, and California doing juvenile rights and prison work. I have seen the school to prison pipeline in operation, I have seen the tragic consequences of lost education to both the individuals and society, and I have seen that these consequences fall quite heavily on students of color.

HB 3435 is a rational attempt to address the problem. There is little financial cost to the proposed legislation. It adds some reasonable procedures, some workable caps on the length of exclusions, and some important reporting requirements which we believe will help prevent unneeded discipline, especially for students with minor offenses, and lower the overall exclusions rates.

The Lawyers' Committee encourages this important legislative effort to safeguard the educational opportunity of all the state's children. Thank you.