

# An Act to Help Students Stay in School (H.3435)



An Act to Help Students Stay in School proposes changes to current Massachusetts's law governing school exclusions

## The Need for Change in Our Schools

### Exclusion

- School exclusions have increased dramatically in the last several years in Massachusetts. During the 2002-2003 school year, 1,949 incidents resulted in exclusion of a student for 10 days or more. During the 2007-2008 school year, 4200 incidents resulted in exclusion of 10 days or more. That is more than double in five years!
- During the 2007-08 school year, 68,928 incidents of school exclusions resulted in 34,561 students excluded from school for 1 or more days.
  - More than 5000 students, including approximately 250 kindergartners, were excluded from their elementary schools.
  - **296** children were **permanently** excluded from school.
- Many Massachusetts school districts exclude students from school for non-violent misconduct that does not threaten student and school staff safety.

### Disparities in exclusion

- Of the 34,561 student exclusions in Massachusetts during the 2007-2008 school year:
  - 57%, nearly 3/5 of excluded students, were low-income.
  - More than 1/2 of reported student exclusions were students with disabilities.
  - **17% of students excluded were African American students** (who make up only 8% of the total student population); **25% of students excluded were Hispanic students** (who make up only 14% of the total student population).
  - Furthermore, **21% of students excluded for more than 10 days were African American**, and **29% were Hispanic**.

### Link between exclusion and drop-out

- Research has found that **school exclusion is strongly linked to students dropping out of school**.
- Analysis of data from the national High School and Beyond survey revealed that 31% of sophomores who dropped out of school had been suspended.

*Harsh exclusionary policies are harming our youth and taxing the resources of Massachusetts*

... In these say, it is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education. – Earl Warren, Chief Justice of the United States supreme court. in *Brown v. Board of Education*.

## Key Provisions of the Act

- A 90-school-day cap on all student exclusions (with the exception of firearm violations, which carry a cap of 180 school days).
- A limitation on “zero tolerance” exclusions to those felonies or felony delinquency charges that involve violence toward a person, use of a dangerous weapon, sexual assault, or trafficking in a controlled substance.
- A determination before suspending a student for more than 10 school days that clear and convincing evidence supports a conclusion that the student knowingly or intentionally committed any of the zero tolerance infractions, that there is a substantial likelihood the misconduct will recur, and that the student’s continued presence in school would have a “substantial detrimental effect” on the general welfare of the school.
- A written explanation when excluding a student for more than 10 school days.
- A right of appeal to the Commissioner of the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education after a decision to exclude a child is made at the school district level.
- Annual reports by school districts including the number of disciplinary exclusions, the duration of each exclusion, the reason for each exclusion, the alternative education options provided to students and the number of students re-admitted.

*Prevent unfair and unnecessary school exclusions.*

*Protect our future.*

*Support An Act To Help Students Stay in School!*

For more information, please go to [www.massadvocates.org](http://www.massadvocates.org) website or contact:

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An Act to Help Students Stay in School is supported by the Coalition to Keep Kids in School, Adelante, Inc., American Civil Liberties Union of Massachusetts, Asian American Legal Defense Education Fund, Beverly Bootstraps Community Services, Boston Asian Youth Essential Service, Brockton Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Center for Collaborative Education, Center for Public Representation, Chelsea Collaborative, Children's Law Center of Massachusetts, Citizens for Juvenile Justice, Citizens for Public Schools, Coalition Against Poverty, Community Legal Services & Counseling Center, Compass Youth Program of Action, Inc., Disability Law Center, East Boston Ecumenical Community Council, Family and Children's Service of Greater Lynn, Jewish Alliance for Law and Social Action, La Vida, Inc., Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights under Law of the Boston Bar Association, Lynn Community Connections Coalition, Lynn Economic Opportunity, Inc., Massachusetts Advocates for Children, Massachusetts Appleseed, Massachusetts Bar Association, Massachusetts Law Reform Institute, Medical Legal Partnership | Boston, Mental Health Legal Advisors Committee, MetroWest Legal Services, My Turn, NAACP New England Area Conference, Neighborhood Legal Services, Operation Bootstrap, Parent Professional Advocacy League, Project HIP-HOP, The Highlands Coalition, The School Therapy Group, South Coastal Counties Legal Services, Straight Ahead Ministries, Inc. - Lynn Youth Reentry Project, Youth Empowerment Services, Inc., and Western Massachusetts Legal Services.