



HEALTH CARE FOR ALL



# An Act Supporting Healthy Development Among Preschoolers HD 1031 (Representative Balser) / SD 1205 (Senator DiDomenico)

<p><b>What problem does this bill address?</b></p>	<p>An expulsion early in life can have a 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 incarceration. The impact of exclusionary discipline is felt disproportionately by young boys generally, and by black and Hispanic boys in particular, as they are expelled and suspended at significantly higher rates than other children.</p> <p>Research indicates that the impact of suspension and expulsion on toddlers is twofold; exclusion from school negatively impacts cognitive, social and emotional development and it can inhibit timely identification of mental health conditions, developmental and learning disabilities, and traumatic experiences including abuse or neglect.</p> <p>Rates of suspension and expulsion among preschoolers in the Commonwealth remain unacceptably high. Nationally, the rate of expulsion of preschoolers is 3 times higher than the rate of expulsion in grades K-12. A 2005 study at the Yale Child Study Center of rates of preschool expulsion ranked Massachusetts ninth in the nation. Out of 185 preschool teachers in Massachusetts, over 39% reported having expelled at least one preschool student over the past 12 months and 15% reported suspending a student.</p>
<p><b>What difference will this bill make?</b></p>	<p>This bill would require that the Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) align regulations with joint policy recommendations of the US Departments of Health and Human Services and Education and 2017 revision to Head Start Program regulations. This bill would require EEC to issue performance specifications aimed at:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• setting goals for substantially restricting the use of suspension and expulsion</li> <li>• ensuring that use of exclusion policies when necessary is free of bias and discrimination</li> <li>• encouraging early education programs to access assistance to improve teacher skills and to support individual children and their families to address behavioral health concerns without use of exclusionary disciplinary practices</li> </ul>
<p><b>Why is this bill needed NOW?</b></p>	<p>With severely limited resources, EEC has 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.</p>