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PRESS RELEASE

Student Advocacy Center lends important voice to legislators

The “Rethink Discipline” bill package, HB 5618-5695, have passed both the House and Senate and are on to the Governor’s Office. Student Advocacy Center has been actively working to revise the state’s harsh school discipline code for more than 15 years.

“We are beyond thrilled that so many people across so many sectors came together to revise our state discipline code,” said SAC Executive Director Peri Stone-Palmquist, who personally became interested in this issue 15 years ago when she met SAC founder and then-director Ruth Zweifler. “I have personally met countless parents and students, who have shared their hurt, outrage, depression, pain and desperation due to our state’s harsh school discipline. I am hopeful that that these bills will result in fewer long-term removals, will dramatically decrease the length of removals, and will encourage districts to try new, creative, restorative ways to truly teach and support our children.”

The bills have several major components:

- End mandatory expulsions for all infractions (except possession of a gun), giving districts discretion to keep students in school.
- Requires school districts to consider lesser interventions before suspending and expelling.
- States that suspension and expulsions over 10 days are NOT justified unless a district can demonstrate that it has considered things such as lesser interventions, age, disciplinary history, disability, whether safety was threatened, etc.
- Defines expulsions as any removal of 60 days or more.
- Goes into effect Aug. 1, 2017

Stone-Palmquist noted that many students, parents and organizations have championed a revised state code for many years, including Michigan Protection and Advocacy, ACLU of Michigan, the Michigan School Justice Partnership and its county teams, NASW-Michigan, Education Trust, Michigan’s Children, Michigan League for Public Policy and many others.

“I am particularly proud of our students in our Youth Action Michigan Program for their advocacy,” Stone-Palmquist said. “They faced their nerves and shared their painful stories. They traveled to Lansing many times. They met with legislators.”

Currently, about 7 students are expelled from Michigan schools every school day and half are not placed in an educational environment. “I look forward to better days ahead,” said Stone-Palmquist.

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