

Minnesota House of Representatives
Education Policy Committee
Chair – Rep. Richardson
March 25, 2022

Re: HF 3401 – Can we not suspend students with special education needs

Madam Chair and Members,

Many thanks again for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Idil Abdull; I am a Somali Autism Mom and Advocate.

Today, I want to tell you about students with special education needs and why it is important to teach them and not punish them because of their disability. I have told you before and for years now that my son who has nonverbal autism was suspended by Bloomington Public School District.

The teacher did not give him his communication device, changed his daily routine then suspended him with the principal. My kid did not understand suspension then and does not understand it now. Autism as you may know is a disability that is medically diagnosed. Individuals with autism have various challenges including communication skills, sensory needs, self-care skills, social and behavior regulation skills.

We would not punish someone who was missing a leg for not running fast, we would not punish someone who was missing an ear for not hearing well, we would not punish someone for bumping into things for being blind. Yet, we are punishing students with disabilities because of their disability.

There was a superintendent in this committee few years ago who testified and stated that “we often suspend students with disabilities because we need a break and to regroup.” I want you to think about that and digest. Let me repeat it for you and this is what I was also told by Bloomington school district – we suspend students with disabilities because we need a break and to regroup.

How can this be ok with anyone? Most of all lawmakers? This can not be ok.

The adults who chose to be special education teachers and principals cannot, shall not and must not be allowed to kick students from school because they need a break. Come on now.

Imagine if a chef said in the middle of a packed restaurant – excuse me but I need you all to leave because I need a break and to regroup. Imagine if a nurse said to her patient in the middle of medical treatment – excuse me but I need to kick you out for five days because I need a break and regroup. Imagine if a lawyer said to a jury in the middle of a court case, I need you all to leave for 10 days because I need to regroup and take a break.

Above actions would make headlines and would never be tolerated.

Why should we tolerate them for our most vulnerable children? Our kids deserve you all to stand up for them and say no more. Students with disabilities who do not understand cause/affect nor suspension should not be punished. The school must state that in their individual education plan.

If the adults who chose this profession are not able to handle it, then I say get out of the kitchen.

Or it could be that these adults need training, resources, and should be held accountable for which you are able and can provide as lawmakers.

As always, I thank you for your time.

Idil