



**TO: Members of the Joint Legislative Justice Oversight Committee**  
**FROM: Jay Diaz, Staff Attorney / Public Advocate, ACLU-VT**  
**DATE: Oct. 29, 2015**  
**SUBJECT: Make Suspension a Last Resort and Avoid the “School-to-Prison-Pipeline”**

On behalf of the ACLU of Vermont and the Vermont Dignity in Schools Coalition, I am here today because we believe every child in Vermont deserves an equal chance to access their education and learn from their mistakes. Unfortunately, in Vermont’s schools, children who misbehave in minor ways may not get that chance. Instead, they are kicked out of school for days, weeks, and months. These punishments are usually unnecessary to maintain school safety, do nothing to correct misbehavior, and do not account for the student’s individual circumstances. And, minority students (students with disabilities, students of color, and students from low-income families) are 2-3 times more likely to be removed from Vermont schools. We must do better for the sake of Vermont’s children and Vermont’s future.

### **What’s Wrong with Kicking Kids Out of School?**

- Suspension encourages misbehavior and makes schools less safe/conducive to learning
- Suspension leaves children unsafe, unsupervised, unhealthy, and unproductive
- Suspension and in-school arrest leads children down the School-to-Prison-Pipeline
- As described in the Kicked Out! Report, minority students are suspended more often

### **What Happens if We Do Not Reimagine School Discipline?**

- Vermont’s most disadvantaged children will continue to perform at lower levels
- Vermont’s most disadvantaged children will continue to struggle to get out of poverty
- Vermont’s most disadvantaged children will continue to end up in the juvenile and criminal justice systems at disproportionate rates
- Vermonters will continue to unnecessarily spend tax money on courts, jails, and benefits
- Vermont businesses will continue to suffer a shortage of capable employees and our economy will lose potential innovators

### **How Can Vermont Rethink School Discipline?**

- We must keep kids safe by keeping them in school and making suspension a last resort.
- Schools, communities, courts, and police departments must collect more data to appropriately target efforts and ensure our methods are evidence-based
- We must fund the training of teachers, administrators, courts, and police departments, so they have the tools to appropriately work with and support struggling students