

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMPILATION OF PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Submitted to the Committee on Youth Health & Safety, Select
For HB 516

Compiled on: Monday, March 20, 2023 10:34 PM

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Hearing Date: March 20, 2023 2:30 PM - or upon final adjourn./recess or bill referral if permission granted

Sandy Bagwell
Self-Analyst
Lubbock, TX

FOR. This should be reported.

Ashley Cole, Mrs.
self and teacher
Fort Worth, TX

For, This bill instructs schools to collect data regarding school discipline and law enforcement.

Carolyn Parmer
self
Austin, TX

Please vote FOR HB 516. Thank you.

Shannon Hoffman

The Hogg Foundation for Mental Health

Austin, TX

House Bill 516 would require school districts to collect and report certain incident-based data related to disciplinary or law enforcement actions taken against students. The collection of this data is critical for Texas. Despite the lack of evidence that exclusionary discipline is an effective method of changing students' behavior in schools, it is a common practice. More than one in ten Texas students were suspended, expelled, or placed in an alternative education program during the 2019-2020 school year. More than ninety-one percent of these were coded as a code of conduct violation; why students are being disciplined or what is needed to support teachers in the classroom is unknown. The data is unavailable to sufficiently evaluate what is needed to better support students, teachers, and schools.

When students are relocated out of their typical learning environment, research shows an increased likelihood of lowered academic performance, dropping out, antisocial behavior, and future contact with the justice system. Alternatively, cultivating well-being at schools is shown to subsequently improve academic achievement and the school's climate including improved students' test scores, commitment to school, attendance, grades, graduation rates, while decreasing truancy and disciplinary rates.

Stress and trauma can affect various aspects of a student's experience in school, including academic performance, behavior in class, interpersonal relationships, and mental health. Youth behaviors stemming from unidentified mental health concerns, substance use, or trauma can be misunderstood as "bad" behavior, often leading to punitive discipline practices. This issue is crucial for students with disabilities who experience disproportionate rates of removals from their classrooms. Further, research shows that children identified as having an emotional disturbance had higher rates of discipline than any other category of disability.

Removing students from their classrooms and criminalizing youth's responses to trauma or mental health concerns should not be a solution to addressing students with overwhelming challenges and barriers. When there are no other resources at hand, classroom removals are often implemented in response. Increased reliance on exclusionary discipline is heightened when schools do not have adequate services to provide alternative responses to disruptive behavior. The effects of punitive discipline can have adverse effects on school climate, often negatively affecting students' sense of safety, well-being, and ability to learn. HB 516 would help Texas collect better data and strategize how to best support students, teachers, and schools leading to better outcomes for all students.

Sarah Berel-Harrop

Self / Seminarian, Intern Minister & Director of Religious Education

Farmers Branch, TX

I write in support of HB 516. There's a parental rights movement asking for detailed information about curriculum. As a parent, I spoke with teachers to get such information. There is no such channel of information to get an understanding of how frequently disciplinary measures including extreme measures such as restraints, tasers, or pepper spray are used against children and youth - and who's being disciplined.

We need this type of transparency so we can assess the disciplinary methods and disciplinary philosophy of our public schools and have public conversations about them.

EVE Margolis

self

Austin, TX

I support this bill. When we talk about parental freedom to do what is best for our kids, to know what they are exposed to in curriculum and beliefs, shouldn't we include at the very least the "freedom" to know how our children are disciplined? This is at best an oversight and at worst an ACLU violation. Schools need to proactively provide ANY actions taken against students.

Susan Burek

Self: I am Parent and an advocate for people with disabilities

Austin, TX

Thank you for allowing me to testify regarding HB 516. My name is Sue Burek and I live in Austin, Texas. I'm a parent, an advocate for people with disabilities, and a member of several advocacy organizations that serve families with children with disabilities, including Texas Parent to Parent, Protect Texas Fragile Kids, and Loving Hearts for All.

I am testifying IN SUPPORT OF HB 516, which instructs schools to collect data regarding school discipline and law enforcement actions against a student. It is very important to collect these data in order to evaluate the fairness and appropriateness of these actions in school districts and open-enrollment charter schools, and/or to identify any patterns of bias or unfairness in the administration of these actions.

Please vote to APPROVE HB 516. Thank you very much for your consideration of my request.

Margaret Heinkel-Wolfe

self

DENTON, TX

FOR