

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMPILATION OF PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Submitted to the Committee on Youth Health & Safety, Select
For HB 4449

Compiled on: Monday, April 17, 2023 6:45 PM

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Hearing Date: April 17, 2023 11:30 AM - or upon final adjourn./recess or bill referral if permission granted

Sharon Beck

Self chef

Montgomery, TX

Power should be divided up, not one person. People are ruining this country built on our freedom and constitution

Ramey Frazier

Self

Fort Worth, TX

Representative Reynolds,

I would like to express my support for HB 4449, regarding the establishment of a task force within public schools to study disciplinary practices and policies. Many of the current policies and practices currently in place do more harm than good.

Punishments that isolate students from positive social influences, coursework, and supportive environments reinforce negative outcomes.

Eric Kunish, Chair

National Alliance on Mental Illness-Central Texas Affiliate

Austin, TX

We support this bill!

Shannon Hoffman

The Hogg Foundation for Mental Health

Austin, TX

Over the past two decades, rates of Texan children who have felt hopeless, struggled with anxiety or depression, and experienced suicidal ideation have been rising. For a student experiencing trauma, stress, or other difficult life events, learning can be challenging. Trauma and stress are associated with difficulties with concentration, memory, motivation, and decision making. Alternatively, students who are emotionally and mentally well can better engage in learning.

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. This issue is crucial for students of color and those with disabilities who experience disproportionate rates of removals from their classrooms. Research shows that while students of color do not "misbehave" more frequently or more seriously, they are disproportionately disciplined and arrested at school. Further, research shows that children identified as having an emotional disturbance had higher rates of discipline than any other category of disability. 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.

Despite the lack of evidence that exclusionary discipline is an effective method of changing students' behavior in schools, it is often used. More than one in ten Texas students were suspended, expelled, or placed in an alternative education program during the 2019-2020 school year. Of those removals, more than ninety-one percent were a code of conduct violation. Even in the midst of a pandemic, children were suspended, expelled, or placed in an alternative education program over 550,000 times during the 2020-2021 school year. Almost three-fourths of these were a code of conduct violation. Whether in-person or virtual, stakeholders do not have data on why a majority of students are being disciplined, or what is needed to support teachers in the classroom.

Increased reliance on discipline is heightened when schools do not have adequate services to provide alternative responses to disruptive behavior. When there are no other resources at hand, classroom removals may be implemented rather than research-based practices. The effects of punitive discipline can have adverse effects on school climate, often negatively affecting students' sense of safety, their well-being, and ability to learn. Cultivating well-being at schools is shown to subsequently improve academic achievement and school climates, including improved students' test scores, commitment to school, attendance, grades, graduation rates, and truancy and disciplinary rates. HB 4449 would offer a chance for deeper conversations on these issues in order to better support all Texas students.

Sabrina Gonzalez Saucedo
Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities
Austin, TX

Chair Thompson & Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on HB 4449, relating to the establishment of a task force to study disciplinary practices and policies in public schools. My name is Sabrina Gonzalez Saucedo, and I am speaking on behalf of the Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities (TCDD), registering on the bill.

TCDD is established by state and federal law and is governed by 27 board members, appointed by the Governor, 60% of whom are individuals with developmental disabilities or family members of individuals with disabilities. The Council's purpose in law is to encourage policy change so that people with disabilities have opportunities to be fully included in their communities and exercise control over their own lives.

HB 4449 would establish a school discipline task force to examine school discipline practices and policies in public schools throughout this state. The bill would require the task force to look at punitive and exclusionary disciplinary practices like suspension, corporal punishment, restraint, disciplinary alternative education programs and more. Additionally, the analysis of these practices would be disaggregated by important student demographics such as race, gender, and disability status among other indicators. This is especially important given the well-documented negative impacts of punitive school discipline practices and the disproportionate nature in which they are used against students with disabilities.

Given the understanding that students with disabilities are the subject of disproportionate discipline practices, TCDD has a recommendation to ensure the perspectives of parents of students with disabilities are considered in the task force. TCDD respectfully recommends that in Section 2 (b)(2)(A), the bill language specify that one of the required parent members of the task force be the parent of a student receiving special education services.

School discipline policies and procedures deserve to be fully examined to address disproportionality, increase positive student outcomes, and retain a supported teacher workforce. As such, TCDD finds the aims of HB 4449 to be consistent with our mission, guiding principles, and policy priorities. Please feel free to contact us for additional information or if we can be of additional service.

Respectfully submitted,
Sabrina Gonzalez Saucedo
Public Policy Analyst
Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities