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BILL: Senate Bill 651
TITLE: Public Schools – Suspensions and Expulsions
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POSITION: OPPOSE
COMMITTEE: Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs
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Senate Bill 651 prohibits prekindergarten students from being suspended or expelled from public schools; authorizing the suspension or expulsion of students in kindergarten, first grade, or second grade if the student has knowingly brought a firearm to school or has possessed a firearm at school; requires the school to provide specified supports to address the student's behavior; and requires the school system to remedy the impact of the student's behavior through specified intervention methods.

PSSAM **opposes** Senate Bill 651.

Local superintendents must provide schools that are safe so that students come to school every day without fear. We recognize that students who are not in a safe environment will not be successful in school. School suspensions and expulsions are a necessary consequence of keeping all students safe in our public schools. It is important to note that school suspensions or expulsions in Maryland have been declining. In school year 2015-2016, Maryland's rate of suspensions and expulsions for all students was 4.3 percent, representing a significant decrease from the 2006-07 school year when the rate was 9.0 percent.

PSSAM firmly believes that suspension or expulsion must be a last resort when dealing with student behavior. However, school policies regarding a student bringing a firearm to school must require school officials to hand down specific, consistent punishment—usually suspension or expulsion. The punishment must apply to all students regardless of age. That being said, a student in kindergarten or first or second grade who is suspended for knowingly bringing a firearm to school or possessing a firearm at school must be returned to the local school system by minimizes any disruption to the student's academic instruction.

Local school system support is provided through various channels that include positive behavior interventions and supports, a behavior intervention plan, a referral to a student support team, a referral to an individualized education program or a referral for appropriate community-based services. The school system already remedies the effect of a student's behavior through appropriate intervention methods that may include restorative practices, as defined in the bill.

Finally, PSSAM requests local flexibility when dealing with prekindergarten students. There are rare incidents when there is no choice but to exclude a prekindergarten child from a classroom to ensure safety for all students. One example is if continued placement in the class and/or program clearly jeopardizes the physical safety of the child

and/or his/her classmates as assessed by a qualified early childhood mental health consultant AND all possible interventions and supports recommended by a qualified early childhood mental health consultant aimed at providing a physically safe environment have been exhausted.

For the reasons stated above, PSSAM **opposes** Senate Bill 651.