

*NYS Senate Standing Committees on Education and NYC Education Hearing on Judith Kaye
Solutions Not Suspensions Act (S1040)*

Families Together in New York State (FTNYS) is a family-run organization that represents families of children and youth with social, emotional, behavioral and cross-systems challenges. Our goal is to ensure that ALL children and youth have the support they need in order to succeed. This is why **FTNYS supports the passage of the Solutions not Suspensions Bill**, which will protect vulnerable youth and their families.

The learning loss that occurs due to suspensions is tremendous. Students can be suspended for up to 180 days under current law. Continuing education plans for suspended students can be vague at best and nonexistent at worst. This communication gap creates strained relationships between parents, teachers, and administrators that becomes a destructive cycle. The COVID-19 Pandemic already accounted for half a year's worth of learning loss in some subjects, and suspensions are holding back student education.

What happens to youth affects the entire family unit. A parent or caregiver has their job impacted by a surprise need for childcare, which then impacts the economic security of the household. It also threatens the graduation rates of students which limits their career options and can contribute to generational and cyclical poverty. Many of our families are one missed paycheck away from dire consequences or child welfare system involvement due to perceived issues that are rooted in poverty.

Suspensions are also an equity issue. They have a disproportionate impact on students of color and students with disabilities. According to a study done by the National Institute of Mental Health, "findings suggest minority children or children with a low socioeconomic status experience disciplinary bias in the classroom." In New York City, "Just over 40% of all school suspensions were given to a student with a disability last school year even though they only make up roughly 20% of all public-school students." Suspension is a racial justice and civil rights issue.

The Solutions not Suspensions Bill will shorten the maximum length of suspension from 180 to 20 school days, which will reduce staggering learning loss. It will also require school codes of conduct to include restorative approaches to discipline and to proactively foster a school community based on cooperation, communication, trust, and respect. We hope this will create a more equitable school disciplinary system for students of color and those with disabilities.

The systems that serve our youth and families do not exist in a vacuum. Improper use of suspensions has a direct link to behavioral health system involvement such as increased risk of

suicide and substance use. Young people who are not in school also have a documented increased risk of interaction with the criminal justice system. One suspension can be the domino that starts a chain reaction of harm to the young person and those who love them. Inversely, proper funding and implementation of mental health services in schools can address the root issues of certain behaviors which lead to suspensions and classroom disruption. Restorative practices have a documented pattern of positive outcomes, and punitive ones only serve to worsen underlying issues and fuel the school to prison pipeline.

We call on New York State to pass this bill so that youth can receive a full and robust education and not have their lives disrupted from a single mistake. Thank you.