



May 3r, 2023

Hello. My name is Cruz, my pronouns are he/they, and I'm a youth leader with Make the Road NY. I am here today to call on the New York State Legislature to pass the Solutions Not Suspensions Act because I want to make sure that myself, my siblings, and future generations of kids are not excluded from their classrooms and miss valuable education. When students, who may simply not know between wrong or right and not be receiving the support they need, are removed from school, they are discouraged from attending.

I've experienced an in-school suspension myself. In the 6th grade I made a mistake that was based on a dare, and instead of being talked through it and understanding why it was wrong, I was suspended for a few days. It honestly didn't teach me anything at all, I was put in a room with other students and made to do worksheets. None of my teachers passed by to check if I did anything right or if I had any questions. They just simply left me to do worksheets. I didn't feel supported and when I went back to school I didn't understand what we were doing since I didn't see the previous lessons, so I was behind all of my other classmates. This then spiraled into me failing a few classes and having to go to summer school. Seeing that this hasn't only happened to me and it's happening everywhere, I think it's irritating. As more students get pushed out of school they are more likely to drop out, fall into street violence, or end up going to jail. This is the school-to-prison and deportation pipeline and it needs to be fixed. I believe that it can be with the Solutions Not Suspensions bill.

Students should not have to worry about getting suspended for minor infractions, like being late or for projecting when we are having a bad day. Holding young people accountable does not mean it needs to be done punitively. The current idea of accountability should not be setting us up for failure. We need to use the alternatives that exist if people really want youth to succeed. We should instead be held accountable with the support of our communities. I believe that schools need to focus on supporting us students with mental, physical and emotional problems by investing in social workers and guidance counselors. Harming us further would be avoided if more schools implemented restorative justice and actually get to the core of the issue.

That's why I'm calling on the New York State Legislature to pass the Solutions Not Suspensions Act, S.1040, A. 5691. Us students shouldn't have to be here on a school day. We should be in school learning, socializing and being supported instead of being criminalized.