

Good afternoon, and thank you for taking the time to hold this important hearing today. My name is Ina Ferguson, and I am a longtime resident of Buffalo, and an advocate for passing the Solutions Not Suspensions Act. In the city of Buffalo, we have dealt with the consequences of suspensions on our youth. We have made some progress, but for true justice, we must pass statewide legislation that allows every child to receive the public education that is their right.

Buffalo is a city that struggles with poverty and is economically disadvantaged. We work hard to do the best we can for our children. But when our children are being kicked out of school for nonviolent behaviors, they are being set up to fail, and to begin the path of the school to prison pipeline. In Buffalo, just as it is across the state and the country, it is Black, brown, and special needs children that are disproportionately suspended. This has to stop, and the Solutions Not Suspensions Act is part of how we end this.

I was proud to be a part of organizations like the Alliance for Quality Education and Citizen Action that helped to reform Buffalo's code of conduct. What prompted this was an incident where a student was sent home from school for non violent behavior, and was killed on the streets. We have implemented some of the changes that are a part of the SOLUTIONS Not Suspensions Act, including eliminating suspensions for grades pre-k through 3. It's a start, but we can and must do so much more, in every community.

I have advocated for change for many years. Suspensions don't work. Punishment doesn't change behavior. This legislation has been around for almost a decade, and has never had a vote in the Legislature. I'm asking you to change that, to pass Solutions Not Suspensions, and to make sure that all of our students can stay in school, and that our schools have the support and resources to have alternatives to suspension. You have the power to change this injustice, and I'm asking you to use your power for the good of my community and all communities across New York State. Thank you for your time.

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