



May 3rd, 2023

Good afternoon, My name is Jeremy and my pronouns are he/him. I am in 11th grade and I go to high school on Long Island. I am a youth leader with Make the Road New York and today I am reading a testimony on behalf of my best friend Christian, who could not be here with us.

I am here today to call on the New York State Legislature to pass the Solutions Not Suspensions Act, S.1040, A. 5691.

At the beginning of this school year, I was suspended for 5 days for something that was blown out of proportion. My friend and I, both Black and brown presenting young men, had walked over to the school doors, with the intention of leaving school grounds. But as we approached the door, we changed our minds and decided to go back to class. At that moment, a teacher saw us and we were reported to administrators. The next day when I arrived at school, I was called to the principal's office and I was immediately suspended. During my suspension, I fell behind on my school work and it took me a long time to catch up. I felt confused by the decision to remove me from school for wanting to skip classes. I was basically punished for making the right decision. The school didn't care about me being in class, they cared more about punishing me and making me another statistic as a Black male student.

Knowing that we will be punished for any reason at all is discouraging. All students should have the right to be in class. Students should feel safe making good choices, and learning from their mistakes. Suspensions do more harm than good, I should not have been suspended for an infraction that didn't happen. These zero tolerance rules are ridiculous and unjust, especially when they target students that look like me. I believe wholeheartedly that if Solutions Not Suspensions was a law at the time of my suspension, the situation would have resulted differently and I would not have been kept away from my education. My school would have had fair and equitable discipline policies that address racial disparities. With restorative practices, a conversation or a warning would have felt better and would have had a deeper and more positive impact on me. I would have felt more encouraged and enthusiastic about going to school knowing that someone cared about me feeling safe and comfortable being in the building.

Instead we are welcomed with long lines to pass through metal detectors and are taken out of class at random to have our bags and bodies searched. It feels like we are in a prison or jail, except we are at school. It feels like our schools are so eager to suspend us that they spend more time looking for reasons to get us in trouble, than actually teaching and nurturing us. Solutions Not Suspensions is our hope to ending these harmful practices. That's why I'm calling on the New York State Legislature to pass the Solutions Not Suspensions Act, S.1040, A. 5691. The time is now for NY State to end racist discipline practices and instead use restorative justice practices that actually help us learn and grow. It is overdue for the state to start treating us as students and not a threat. Thank you.