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Hello, my name is Jessica Lucero, I use she/her pronouns and I'm a leader with Make the Road New York. I'm also a senior at a high school in Queens. Thank you to all of the Senators of the Education Committee for being here today to listen to why it is so important that New York State passes the Solutions Not Suspensions Act.

When we returned to school after the pandemic, I observed many unfair suspensions with my classmates for things that seemed typical of youth of our age and were routine to daily life. Some examples where my school suspended my classmates unfairly included forgetting to bring their not ID, arriving late to classes, or simply for having dress code violations. This left me very surprised and appalled at how easily teachers can suspend students. I started thinking, is school a place where you can learn and make mistakes? How is it possible that each time that we make a mistake, we are punished with isolation and lack of class instruction?

In addition to being unfairly suspended, during the time my classmates were out of school, they were not contacted by teachers to complete their assignments. As a result, I watched them fall behind in all of our classes. I felt very anxious and pressured because it felt as if it was happening to me. I would have liked to see that our school worried more about the students they suspended; ask them how they were after what happened, instead of just looking down on them. Just because a young person makes a mistake, or dresses in a way that the teacher doesn't like, or doesn't get along with another teacher, that does not mean that the youth is a bad person. These suspensions that I have seen my classmates go through have left me really scared, since I was able to see how easily and quickly you can be suspended from school.

Through my participation with Make the Road New York, I have been able to learn that not only do these types of injustices happen in my school, but also in several schools. Youth who are unfairly suspended are not alone. Young people like me, we need support. We need to know that the adults at school are going to help us grow and support our mental health. I recently arrived in this country and I am still learning the traditions. We do not all learn at the same pace. We all deserve the opportunity to learn in our classrooms. Students should not be excluded from instructional class time due to their youthlike behavior. The Solutions Not Suspensions Act will strengthen the relationship between adults and young people because it promotes restorative justice practices that get to the root cause of the problem and not harmful punishments. It does not cost any money to adjust the way schools think and practice conflict resolution in schools.

That's why I joined the Solutions Not Suspensions fight because we should be heard. We deserve care from our schools. Passing Solutions Not Suspensions would mean that other students in the future would not have to go through what my classmates went through or become

fearful as I was when I saw what happened. Youth should not only be seen for their mistakes. We have so much potential to grow and learn and impact the world. We deserve Solutions Not Suspensions! Thank you.