



May 3rd, 2023

Good afternoon,

My name is Jocelyn Palafox Diaz. My pronouns are she/ they, and I'm a youth leader at Make the Road New York. After being here several times during the last legislative session today I must say that I feel upset — It's been almost a year since I graduated from High school and it is a shame to still see that the State of New York continues to punish students instead of protecting them.

We have been fighting for Solutions Not Suspensions for 8 years to protect students from punitive practices that pushes mainly Black and brown students into the school -to- prison and deportation pipeline. I personally started fighting for Solutions Not Suspensions since I was in 10th grade. My first two years of high school were remote. During those two years a lot of students missed so many school days for many reasons; schools were not prepared to deal with the pandemic, students didn't have the technology they needed, and students even had to face virtual suspensions. Every year students in New York State lose nearly 1 million days of school because of suspensions and not to mention that every time a young person who drop out of school are 3x more likely to end up in the juvenile legal system within a year.

I personally was never suspended but that was because as an undocumented woman of color I knew I needed to do whatever I could to stay out of trouble. I grew up in this country and was able to see that policies only apply to certain people with less privileges. I know it because I have seen some of my peers being suspended from simple teenager behavior and were all students of color. I may no longer be directly impacted by the racist laws in our education system, but my two little brothers can still be punished. One of them is in elementary school and the other one is in high school. They have to be extra careful and tip- toe like I did to stay out of trouble. I know I have graduated but this fight is so important to me because I don't want neither my siblings or future generations to have to go through the same racist school environments

Passing Solutions Not Suspensions would mean that students will not go through unfair treatment but it will actually protect them from harsh and punitive

punishments. This bill will protect Pre-K-3 grades who are currently being suspended across New York State. It will also protect older folks who can get suspended up to 180 days. Yes! That's a whole school year. Now more than ever we need to do better for all students especially when suspensions disproportionately harm Black, Brown, and TGNCIQ youth as well as students with disabilities!

Albany cannot continue failing the students. At least 15 other states in the country have passed laws to limit suspensions. New York State must do what is right and protect students. The time is now, pass Solutions Not Suspensions!