



June 25, 2019

The Honorable Jason M. Lewis
Chair, Joint Committee on Education
Massachusetts State House, Room 511-B
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Alice Hanlon Peisch
Chair, Joint Committee on Education
Massachusetts State House, Room 473-G
Boston, MA 02133

RE: Support for H.401/S.264: *An Act Supporting Healthy Development Among Preschoolers*

Dear Chair Lewis, Chair Peisch, and Honorable Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Massachusetts Association for Mental Health (MAMH), thank you for your leadership on the Joint Committee on Education and for the opportunity to submit testimony today in strong support of H.401/S.264: *An Act Supporting Healthy Development Among Preschoolers*.

Formed over a century ago, MAMH is dedicated to promoting mental health and preventing mental health conditions and associated disability. We are committed to advancing prevention, early intervention, effective treatment, and research for people of all ages. We seek to eliminate stigma and discrimination and advance full inclusion in all aspects of community. MAMH has a demonstrated track record of furthering its mission by convening stakeholders across the behavioral health and public health communities; disseminating emerging knowledge; and providing subject matter expertise to inform public policy, service delivery, and payment methods. MAMH is also an Executive Committee member of the Massachusetts Children's Mental Health Campaign.

H.401/S.264: *An Act Supporting Healthy Development Among Preschoolers* requires the Department of Early Education and Care to issue performance specifications to prohibit or severely limit the practice of preschool suspensions and expulsions. Children from families with low incomes, children from racial and/or ethnic minority backgrounds, children with disabilities, and children who have experienced multiple adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are all more likely to be suspended or expelled, but are also more likely to benefit from an early education program that supports social, emotional, and behavioral development.¹ H.401/S.264 helps the Commonwealth fulfill its responsibility to these vulnerable children by setting benchmarks and incentivizing skill development for staff and teachers to improve the quality of early childhood education.

The experiences of children during their early years of life have a critical impact on their developing brains and have consequences both in the near term and over the lifespan. The U.S. Department of

Education describes that “young students who are expelled or suspended are as much as 10 times more likely to drop out of high school, experience academic failure and grade retention, hold negative school attitudes, and face incarceration than those who are not.”ⁱⁱⁱ It is time to end these unfair and discriminatory practices, and help our children access high-quality early learning environments; evaluations and referrals to identify and address development delays, disabilities, and mental health needs; and appropriate and evidence-based social-emotional supports.

Thank you again for your leadership, consideration of this testimony, and attention to the needs of your constituents with behavioral health conditions and their families. Please move H.401/S.264: *An Act Supporting Healthy Development Among Preschoolers* favorably out of Committee.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Danna Mauch".

Danna Mauch, PhD
President and CEO

ⁱ Maryam Adamu and Lauren Hogan, “Point of Entry: The Preschool to Prison Pipeline” (Washington: Center for American Progress, 2015), available at <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/early-childhood/reports/2015/10/08/122867/point-of-entry/>.

ⁱⁱ U.S. Department of Education, “Policy Statement on Suspension and Expulsion Policies in Early Childhood Settings” (Washington: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2014), available at <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/school-discipline/policy-statement-ece-expulsions-suspensions.pdf>.