



Texas AFT

A Union of Professionals

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March 27, 2025

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Dear Chairman Buckley, Chairman Creighton, and members of the House Committee on Public Education & the Senate Committee on Education K-16:

First, I want to thank you for taking up the important issue of escalating student behavioral problems. This remains a priority item for our members to address and we are grateful for the opportunity to collaborate on legislation to make classrooms safer for students and staff.

It is imperative that we take action to deter physical violence among our students and put an end to increasingly frequent attacks against our educators. As a former educator myself and the elected representative of 66,000 Texas educators, I fully agree with Senator Perry¹ that there should be zero tolerance for physically assaulting any school employee.

That said, any bill regarding student discipline under your consideration must address the root issues of this escalated student behavior and the real-world consequences for teachers and staff:

- **Consequences must match age and behavior:** The consequences for a 6-year-old should look different than they do for a 16-year-old. Furthermore, we should have zero tolerance for not thoroughly investigating why a 6-year-old has so much anger that they would attack their teacher. We also should have zero tolerance for not mandating behavior therapy and family counseling after every one of these incidents that occurs in our schools. Likewise, we should have zero tolerance for anyone who places a student who assaulted a teacher back in their classroom or work setting without that educator's consent. It is the responsibility of educators to make the learning environment safe for students; it is the responsibility of administrators to make the working environment safe for educators.
- **Consequences must be enforced, but they must also be just.** Anyone who grew up in a strict home knows the consequences were intended to get your attention, but it was the interactions with a caring adult following those consequences that truly changed behavior. As a former middle-school alternative education teacher, I can attest to how important it is to build relationships with your students and, simultaneously, how important it is to invest in people who are needed to build those relationships. You cannot debate this issue of student discipline without also meaningfully discussing the woefully inadequate ratio of mental health, social service, counseling, or behavioral therapy staff to students in our Texas public schools.

¹ Richman, Talia. "Zero tolerance or zero consequences? Texas lawmakers debate school discipline." *Dallas Morning News*, 25 March 2025, <https://www.dallasnews.com/news/education/2025/03/25/zero-tolerance-or-zero-consequences-texas-lawmakers-debate-school-discipline/>.



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- **We must invest in resources that address the root causes of the behavior:** The last time we heard debate on this need was in response to one of the worst mass school shootings in our country's history. Yet three years later, we are discussing a return to the purely punitive approach we took prior to 2017. Nowhere in any of the discipline bills do I see mention of or investment in the necessary supports that may assist our enraged 6-year-olds to be in a better place when they are inevitably deposited in the next teacher's class. We need to look at wrap-around measures to address the root cause of student behavior without placing another burden on the shoulders of teachers.

We must do better by our students, our educators, and our families. As I told the Dallas Morning News when asked about House Bill 6², it is incumbent upon Texas to find a healthy balance between showing zero tolerance for violent behavior and getting kids who make mistakes the support they need to address the behavior and make better decisions in the future. Texas AFT and our members want to help you strike that balance. We have ideas that are cost-effective and proven to improve behavior management in the classroom and across the school, and we stand ready to assist in improving the legislation up for debate this session.

With respect,

Zeph Capo

President, Texas AFT

² Richman, Talia. "Will it be easier to kick Texas' littlest kids out of school? Lawmakers may weaken ban." *Dallas Morning News*, 17 March 2025, <https://www.dallasnews.com/news/education/2025/03/17/will-it-be-easier-to-kick-texas-littlest-kids-out-of-school-lawmakers-may-weaken-ban/>.