

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
December 15, 2009

Contacts:

Sarah Biehl, Staff Attorney, Education Law,
Ohio Poverty Law Center
Phone: (614) 221-7201 ext. 130

**Ohio Poverty Law Center Joins National Resolution to
Protect the Human Rights of Students, to End School Pushout and Expulsion**

Dec. 15, 2009 - The Ohio Poverty Law Center has joined with more than 200 organizations, including the National Education Association, School Social Work Association of America, American Civil Liberties Union, and NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, from 40 states, and individuals from across the country to support the Dignity in Schools Campaign (DSC) National Resolution for Ending School Pushout. This is an expansive call that unites advocates, parents, students, educators, and lawyers to expose systemic problems in school systems, provide concrete solutions to improve our collective response to a culture of removal and punishment, and put an end to children being pushed out of schools...based on basic human rights of all students.

The DSC National Resolution is being released as states, including Ohio, submit applications for Race to the Top Funds made available under the federal stimulus package. Federal Department of Education guidelines recommend that states and districts use these funds to promote positive school climates and discipline which is the goal of the Dignity in Schools Campaign.

Currently, many school systems practice negative, harsh discipline policies and law enforcement tactics that push too many students out of school each year. Disciplinary rates are the highest in the nation's history, and have more than doubled over the past three decades. Historically disenfranchised youth, including students of color, students with disabilities, and students in poor communities, are affected the most by these policies. The problem is broader than any one issue. It encompasses, for example:

- Unwelcoming school environments and a lack of relevant and engaging curricula which alienate students and discourage them from attending school;
- Zero tolerance and other exclusionary discipline policies which remove students from school such as repeated and excessive suspension and expulsion, placement into low-quality alternative school programs, police intervention, and referrals to the juvenile justice system;
- Encouragement of low-performing, under-credited or overage students to transfer to a GED program or other alternative setting
- Under-resourced and over-crowded schools where students do not have access to academic counseling and supportive relationships with teachers to help keep them in school; and
- Failure to use effective prevention and intervention for misbehavior, such as counseling, mediation, and positive behavioral support methods, that can address students' needs and keep them in school.

"The DSC believes that schools are treating children as 'problems' to be dealt with, which stems from a societal failure to recognize education as a basic right that should not be denied to any child," says Sarah Biehl, Staff Attorney focusing on education law at the Ohio Poverty Law Center and DSC Core Group Member. "We hope to shift our collective approach to school discipline from one about violence, rules, test scores, and the criminalization of youth to one about equality, dignity, and human rights."

For Further Information (Links):

Visit the Dignity in Schools Campaign website - <http://www.dignityinschools.org>

The Resolution (including list of signatories) -

http://www.dignityinschools.org/files/DSC_National_Resolution.pdf

Itinerary of Planned Actions - <http://www.dignityinschools.org/resolution-activities>

Notes to editors:

1. The National Resolution was drafted by members and supporters of the Dignity in Schools Campaign (DSC), a coalition of advocates, organizers, youth, parents and educators united to call for human rights solutions to school pushout. The process of drafting this Resolution began over a year ago when the DSC created a series of questions to ask youth, parents, advocates and educators about what must be done to end pushout and protect students' human rights to education and to dignified learning environments. A draft Resolution was presented to attendees at the first Dignity in Schools Campaign conference in Chicago in June 2009 where feedback was provided by 150 participants from around the country to improve and enrich the content of the Resolution.

Ohio Poverty Law Center
555 Buttles Avenue
Columbus, Ohio 43215
Phone: (614) 221-7201
Email: sbiehl@ohiopovertylaw.org

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