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Pennsylvania General Assembly
COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
HARRISBURG

Pennsylvania Legislative Black Caucus

MEMORANDUM

DATE: April 28, 2011
TO: All House Members
FROM: Representative Ronald G. Waters, Chairman
Pennsylvania Legislative Black Caucus
SUBJECT: Amendment to Disruptive Student Statute

In the near future, I will be introducing legislation that will amend the public school code, further defining alternative education programs and disruptive students. We must ensure that all children within the commonwealth receive access to a fair education. The public education system should meet the needs of all students. Currently, African American students are 16% of all students in public schools, but 37% of students placed in alternative education programs. My legislation redefines an alternative education program, where disruptive students are removed from regular school programs and placed in alternative education programs where they receive counseling in addition to their educational studies.

Disruptive students are defined as those students who persistently disregard school authority; persistently violating school policies and rules. In addition, a disruptive student must exhibit persistent misconduct meriting either suspension or expulsion under school policy. We must make sure those students who persistently exhibit disruptive behavior negatively affecting the learning process of others receive the necessary assistance to meet their educational needs.

We must avoid mislabeling students who are inconsistently disruptive causing them to be sent directly to an alternative education program for a minor infraction. The current law unfairly penalizes students who may be truant due to nondisruptive reasons beyond the student's control. For example, some students are forced to stay at home to take care of younger siblings, while others are victims of bullying and are too scared to attend school, or are frustrated that they cannot read and perform at grade level. We must constantly evaluate and work to improve the quality of these alternative education programs for the sake of our children. If you would like to co-sponsor this cost-neutral/cost-saving legislation to protect Pennsylvania's students, please contact Danielle Bowers at (717) 772-6955 or dbowers@pahouse.net.