

IN OPPOSITION TO SCHOOL TO PRISON PIPELINE

WHEREAS: All schools must be environments conducive to learning; and

WHEREAS: This includes schools being safe for students, teachers and staff; and

WHEREAS: While to achieve this goal fair student codes of conduct and fair disciplinary measures must be in place and enforced, these policies should not support the school-to-prison pipeline, one of the most important civil rights challenges facing our nation today; and

WHEREAS: Zero-tolerance disciplinary policies are often the first step in a child's journey through the pipeline; and

WHEREAS: Zero-tolerance policies impose severe discipline on students without regard to individual circumstances. Under these policies, children have been expelled for giving Midol to a classmate, bringing household goods (including a kitchen knife) to school to donate to Goodwill, and bringing scissors to class for an art project; and

WHEREAS: Even the American Bar Association has condemned zero-tolerance policies as inherently unjust: "zero tolerance has become a one-size-fits-all solution to all the problems that schools confront. It has redefined students as criminals, with unfortunate consequences. Unfortunately, most current [zero-tolerance] policies eliminate the common sense that comes with discretion and, at great cost to society and to children and families, do little to improve school safety"; and

WHEREAS: There is no evidence that zero-tolerance policies make schools safer or improve student behavior. On the contrary, research suggests that the overuse of suspensions and expulsions may actually increase the likelihood of later criminal misconduct; and

WHEREAS: Resources that could be put towards improving under-resourced schools are instead used for security; and

WHEREAS: The rise in suspensions, expulsions, and school-based arrest may be due, in part, to the rise of high-stakes testing. As a result of test-based accountability regimes such as the No Child Left Behind Act, schools have an incentive to push out low-performing students to boost overall test scores. One study found that schools meted out longer suspensions to students who performed poorly on standardized tests than to high-performing students for similar offenses. This "punishment gap" grew substantially during the period of time when standardized tests were administered, indicating that schools may use "selective discipline" to keep low-performing students out of school during testing days; and

WHEREAS: We must demand accountability for the education of all students. Students who have been expelled or suspended are left to fend for themselves, while the government and school districts are absolved of any responsibility for educating their most at-risk children; and

WHEREAS: Students of color are disproportionately represented at every stage of the school-to-prison pipeline; and

WHEREAS: African-American students are far more likely than their white peers to be suspended, expelled, or arrested for the same kind of conduct at school. In 2003, African-American youth made up 16 percent of the nation's overall juvenile population, but accounted for 45 percent of juvenile arrests; and

WHEREAS: There is no evidence that students of color misbehave to a greater degree than white students. They are, however, punished more severely, often for behaviors that are less serious; and

WHEREAS: Students with special needs are disproportionately represented in the school-to-prison pipeline, despite the heightened protections afforded to them under law. While approximately 8.6 percent of public school children have been identified as having disabilities that impact their ability to learn, a recent survey of correctional facilities found that students with disabilities are represented in jail at a rate nearly four times that; and

WHEREAS: Minority students with disabilities are particularly vulnerable, since many schools regard jail as the default special education placement for poor and minority children. African-American students with disabilities are three times more likely to receive short-term suspensions than their white counterparts, and are more than four times as likely to end up in correctional facilities; and **NOW THEREFORE BE IT**

RESOLVED: AFT Michigan will review and/or develop programs and policies that help promote safe schools and put an end to the school to prison pipeline.

Submitted by: Resolutions Committee

Resolutions Committee recommends the resolution be adopted.