

Retrieved online June 12, 2009 from

<http://www.delawareonline.com/article/20090611/OPINION10/90610053/1111/Common-sense-approach-is-needed-for-'zero-tolerance->

Letter to the editor, Delaware News Journal

June 11, 2009

### **Common-sense approach is needed for 'zero tolerance'**

When Delaware children walk into school, they and their parents should feel safe and know that our laws will protect them and effectively address any problems that might arise. However, we have seen recent examples in which the state's "zero tolerance" policy unfairly punishes students for relatively minor infractions – often expelling them – while school administrators are helplessly bound to follow the letter of the law.

It is for these reasons that I sponsored House Resolution 22, which passed the chamber last month. The legislation creates a Zero Tolerance Task Force that will study and recommend changes to Delaware's school discipline policies. It is our hope to make those proceedings and any sanctions imposed more uniform and consistent and, as a January University of Delaware education policy brief stated, more "common sense."

According to the brief, "research suggests the harmful effects of zero tolerance policies on students and their families may outweigh the benefits of deterring student misbehavior." Quite simply, an elementary school student who brings a knife to school to cut a cake probably should not be facing expulsion, as happened earlier this year at May B. Leasure Elementary School.

We must find a common-sense approach that balances mandatory school crime reporting for serious offenses with giving school administrators professional discretion in administering the policies. That is what the task force will be doing for the next few months, compiling our recommendations so that we might have a law that works equitably and better serves all students and families.

Rep. Michael A. Barbieri  
New Castle