

H.B. 5353 AN ACT CONCERNING INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAMS AND OTHER ISSUES RELATING TO SPECIAL EDUCATION

I am Susan Zimmerman, parent of a twenty-five year young adult with behavioral challenges. When my daughter was five years old, I learned that her arms were being strapped to a chair to prevent her from "hallway walking." I learned this because I was concerned about the agitated state she displayed every day on arriving home. No one was required to tell me about the restraint and no one was required to do an assessment of her functional behavior. The behaviorist we hired concluded her sensory system was being overwhelmed in the classroom and "hallway walking" was her attempt to find relief.

I recognize the education regulations being discussed at today's hearing are intended to correct the abuses that my daughter and I experienced by informing parents about the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) process and about regulations regarding restraint and seclusion. But I do not believe these proposed regulations go far enough because they do not talk about the importance of positive behavioral interventions such as sensory intervention and assistive technology that have proven effective to de-escalate behavior. Lacking these supports, my daughter and others like her are held to a standard they cannot achieve. The result is emotional and physical harm.

Put simply, seclusion or restraint is not an educational intervention and should not be part of an IEP. There is no evidence-based research to suggest that restraint or seclusion is therapeutically effective while there is research to suggest it is both physically and psychologically harmful. Experts generally view its use as a treatment failure.

I urge the committee to ensure that the Individualized Education Plan includes positive behavioral supports and de-escalation techniques with a proven record of reducing problem behaviors. After all, the goal is to increase classroom learning which is not going to happen if a child is spending time out of the classroom.

Further, I strongly urge the committee to consider limiting the use of restraint and seclusion interventions to emergency physical safety situations as has been done in the following states: Oregon, Colorado, Louisiana, Tennessee, Vermont, Wyoming, Georgia, Maine, Nevada, Pennsylvania and Texas. Recent press reports and limited surveying done by the CT State Board of Education suggest the use of restraint and seclusion in Connecticut schools is high. These students would be better served by positive behavior supports.

Finally I ask the committee to consider staff training not just on the implementation of the IEP but also on the proper use in an IEP of behavioral interventions starting with an individual functional assessment. My daughter could and would have stayed in her classroom if her teaching staff had understood how to avoid overwhelming her sensory system. Let's work to keep all of our children in the classroom.

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