

**Testimony before the Select Committee on Children**  
**March 6, 2012**  
**Regarding**  
**HB 5347- AN ACT CONCERNING THE REPORTING OF CHILDREN PLACED IN**  
**SECLUSION**

Good afternoon, Senator Gerratana, Representative Urban and members of the Select Committee on Children. My name is Beth Fleischman Zweibel. I am a resident of Avon, CT and the parent of Joshua, a ten year old, who has PDD-NOS, which stands for Pervasive Developmental Delays, Not Otherwise Specified. I would like to thank the Children's Committee for raising a bill that addresses the reporting requirements of children placed in seclusion as I am all too well aware that seclusion is being improperly utilized and under reported. However, the recording and reporting mandated in HB 5347 do not address the underlying issue at hand: we must work with school administrators to train school staff and teachers to use positive behavioral interventions that have proven success in de-escalating problematic behavior. We cannot allow schools to rely on seclusion as an effective treatment.

My son has been placed in seclusion since age 7 as a method for extinguishing unwanted behaviors. It is neither effective nor humane. All seclusion has taught Joshua is that he is different from his classmates, and when he cannot handle a situation it is best to isolate himself rather than learn the skills and strategies necessary for coping with life's challenges. I have personally seen him carried into a room no larger than a small closet with the door slammed behind him as he was told he can come out when his screaming and crying have de-escalated.

There is no evidence-based research to suggest that seclusion is therapeutically effective; it's physically and psychologically harmful and it needs to be stopped. Children like Joshua need state of the art skill-building interventions that teach them how to cope. Children like Joshua are yearning to be taught life skills and coping strategies alongside their peers by well-trained public school educators who use data collection and data analysis to guide their instruction, rather than a "thinking on one's feet" approach which results in anger, sadness and greater emotional and behavioral disruptions.

Having grown up in Milford under the same roof as a mother who taught for many years at both Jonathan Law and Joseph A. Foran High Schools, it pains me to have to tell this Committee how many times this has occurred to my child and numerous other children in Avon and across this state. When I witness such actions, I always ask myself what type of educator would let this occur? What type of teacher devoting his or her life to helping children would allow this to continue? I can only conclude it's the teacher who lacks the availability of appropriate training in instituting positive behavioral supports to teach Joshua the necessary skills so he would never have to be in that closet in the first place. It wasn't until we hired a costly advocate and forced the district to bring in a Board Certified Behavior Analyst that Joshua's program very slowly began to become less restrictive, less punitive and more effective.

Imagine for a moment you are a little boy who loves going to school and who is bright, friendly, empathetic and talkative, but you have a disability - an invisible disability, which some educators misinterpret as brattiness or laziness. Imagine because of your disability you are frustrated easily by what others would consider the simplest of tasks, or by loud noises, or by changes in routine, or by transitions from one activity to another. To make matters worse you do not have the words to explain what you are feeling if you are even able to process what is happening to you. Imagine that you gauge the success of your day by how many minutes you have spent in isolation. This is Joshua's

daily existence. He feels like a failure when he has to tell me he spent any time in that cold, lonely closet as he describes it.

Why would someone endowed with the responsibility of raising children's self-esteem and improving student performance continue to use seclusion as a viable reinforcement method, getting the same deleterious results time and time again? It's not because the teachers are mean-spirited or lazy or lack intelligence. It's because the tools to act differently, the tools to be more positive, more proactive, nurturing, sensitive and caring, the tools to use scientific-based methods to achieve DIFFERENT results are not at their disposal. The tools to teach these special needs children, who are wanting, yearning, begging to be treated like human beings are not there. YOU can change that. Ban seclusion as an everyday reinforcement strategy. Seclusion should be limited to emergency situations only—

when a child is in danger of harming himself or others. These actions will give school administrators no choice but to employ other methods to reach these children - to teach them concrete, effective, and transferrable coping strategies. It's what CT's children need and deserve.