

Testimony Supporting Senate Bill 1060: An Act Concerning the Use of Restraint and Seclusion in Schools

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Education Committee
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Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleischmann, and Distinguished Members of the Committee on Children:

I am a Policy Fellow at Connecticut Voices for Children, a research-based public education and advocacy organization that promotes the well-being of Connecticut's children, youth, and families.

On behalf of Voices for Children I am here today **to support S.B. 1060: An Act Concerning the Use of Restraint and Seclusion in Schools**. Underlying our work at Voices for Children is the fundamental belief that *all* children, regardless of race, ethnicity, sexuality, class, ability, or geography should be assured of a meaningful opportunity to achieve their full potential. When children are restrained or put in seclusion in a school setting, they are deprived the opportunity for a high-quality educational setting and are at risk for trauma, serious injuries, or even, most tragically, death. **This legislation protects students by preventing the use of physical restraint or seclusion for anything other than emergency situations and requires the topics of restraint, seclusion and other de-escalation techniques as a part of in-service training for teachers.**

In 2014, the Office of the Child Advocate (OCA) published a report on the use of restraints and seclusions among elementary school students. The report found that each year there are more than 30,000 incidents of seclusion and restraint affecting more than 2,500 students. Restraint and seclusion can lead to serious injury. The report found that over the last 3 years, the Connecticut State Department of Education reported more than 1,313 incidents of a child being injured during a restraint or seclusion, with more than 2 dozen injuries categorized as “serious.” These children being restrained and secluded are identified as eligible for special education due to a disability, are disproportionately male, African American or Hispanic/Latino, and could be as young as preschool.¹ The report's findings:

“raise significant concern regarding the frequency with which young children with disabilities were restrained or secluded, the lack of documentation or actual compliance with state laws, and the prevalence of unidentified and unmet educational needs for children subject to forceful or isolative measures.”

Moreover, extensive research shows **“that restraint and seclusion can physically and emotionally harm children—traumatizing and scaring them, and even worsening behaviors that practitioners are seeking to reduce.”**² In fact, the U.S. Department of Education found that: **“There is no evidence that using restraint or seclusion is effective in reducing the occurrence of the problem behaviors that frequently precipitate the use of such techniques.”**³

It is crucial to remember that, as the OCA report makes clear, **“reliance on seclusion and restraint is a symptom of a larger systemic challenge”** of how schools and communities can effectively work to understand and address underlying mental and behavioral health challenges without resorting to dangerous and counterproductive strategies. As the U.S. Department of

Education makes clear, “The foundation of any discussion about the use of restraint and seclusion is that every effort should be made to structure environments and provide supports so that restraint and seclusion are unnecessary.”⁴

The clear need to address mental and behavioral health challenges in order to keep children successful and safely in school is also manifested in the disproportionate rates by which special education students are kicked out of the classroom. Connecticut Voices for Children recently published a report analyzing rates of exclusionary school discipline in Connecticut. The report found that **students with special education needs are also consistently arrested, expelled, and suspended at higher rates than regular education students.** In 2013, special education students were arrested at 3 times the rate of general education students in 2013, 1.8 times more likely to be expelled than general education students, more than twice as likely to receive out-of-school suspensions, and more than one and a half times more likely to receive in-school suspensions than general education students.

Luckily, there are clear and evidence-based practices to decrease both restraint and seclusion and exclusionary school discipline policies. Through training, skilled instruction, and positive behavioral supports, programs around the country have seen a dramatic decrease in utilization of restraint and seclusion. These programs include Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, the Six Core Strategies, and related trauma and expert-informed tiered interventions.

By limiting the use of restraint and seclusion and requiring that educators receive special instruction on de-escalation techniques, this legislation takes important steps towards keeping all children safely in school.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration. Please do not hesitate to reach out to myself or any other staff members with any questions.

Thank you,

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¹ OCA Report

² OCA report

³ “Restraint and Seclusion: Resource Document,” U.S. Department of Education, May 2012. Available at: <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/seclusion/restraints-and-seclusion-resources.pdf>.

⁴ *Ibid.*