

To the attention of the
**Ways and Means Committee
of the Maryland General
Assembly**

**Re: Testimony in support of
HR1166 Education – Physical
Restraint and Seclusion –
Requirements, Reporting, and
Training**

Testimony of
Laura LeBrun Hatcher

21 FEBRUARY 2021

—
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Dear Members of the Ways and Means Committee,

My son, Simon, is a funny and sweet 14 year old. He loves to give big hugs, help cook pizza (his favorite), and play the drums. He also has cerebral palsy, hydrocephalus, autism, vision and hearing loss, cognitive and physical disabilities, and a rare and severe form of Epilepsy.

When Simon was in first grade, he began to attend a new public school. He also began a new medicine to address his life threatening seizures. Simon's medication made him very tired, and he needed a short rest after lunch to be able to attend to the rest of the afternoon. I worked with Simon's classroom teacher, 1:1 aide, and school nurse to make sure his needs would be accommodated by the school as they are legally obliged to do by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

I was assured by all parties involved that Simon would be safely and equitably accommodated. However, within just two weeks of starting school, my happy and sweet little boy became agitated and fearful. Simon was unable to articulate much verbally at the time, so he did not have the words he needed to tell me what was wrong. However, his tears and anxiety alerted me to the fact that something was not right at school.

I called a meeting with Simon's team where I discovered that, every day after lunch, for a 30 minute "rest time," my disabled, non verbal 7-year-old who was prone to life threatening seizures was being placed - alone - in a dark closet on a cot in the nurses' office. When I asked why, I was told it was because "no one has the time to deal with his naps."

I removed Simon from the school immediately, and worked with the public school system to have him relocated to a place that would meet his needs. But the harm was done. Being secluded in a closet every day for 2 weeks did over a year's worth of damage to Simon's mental and behavioral health. My sweet and happy little boy became fearful and anxious. He had separation anxiety, nightmares, and frequent meltdowns. We had to seek outside therapeutic help to mitigate the impact of the school's abuse on Simon and our family. I have still not forgiven myself for letting such a thing happen to my vulnerable child.

Restraint and seclusion of children in school, particularly children with disabilities who are disproportionately impacted by this practice, is abusive and almost always unnecessary. Simon's seclusion was the direct result of the incompetence and callousness of the public school administrators, teachers, aides, and nursing staff with whom I and the state of Maryland entrusted his care. I believe that if there had been appropriate training, requirements, and accountability my vulnerable child would not have suffered as he did.

Your vote to pass **HR1166 Education – Physical Restraint and Seclusion – Requirements, Reporting, and Training** will help ensure no other children are abused in this way by the school personnel entrusted to care for them. I urge you to pass this bill for vulnerable children like Simon, who need you to use your voice and your vote to protect them.

Sincerely, **Laura LeBrun Hatcher, Simon's mom**