

February 24, 2021

Support for HB 1166

My name is Lisa Stephens, our family has been impacted by the use of seclusion and restraint. My son Cooper is autistic and has ADHD and social anxiety. He was in Calvert County Schools throughout his elementary years and thrived, however following a couple of traumatic events, including being dragged down a hallway, at the end of fifth grade we homeschooled him for two years because he did not want to return to school.

Our son expressed a desire to return to public school. We worked really hard with staff to develop an IEP that we felt would be appropriate for him. One of the things we stressed to the team was that Cooper does not respond well to a hands-on approach. We provided the IEP team a tremendous amount of information on how to work successfully with our son.

He was in school for only 3 days before his first incidence of seclusion happened, despite our best efforts to inform staff how to best work with our son. Over the next 12 school days, seclusion and restraint techniques were used a number of times. We believe the number of instances to be 4 or 5 although we only received paperwork for two instances and only after we requested it.

Our son suffered emotional stress and trauma as a result of these practices and had to be put on home and hospital school. He was so traumatized that he refused to return to school. He didn't feel safe and we didn't feel he was in a safe environment. The point is these interventions are dangerous and unnecessary. And it gets worse, there are cases where children have died due to the use of seclusion and restraint.

On November 28th, 2018, Max Benson, a 13 year old autistic boy in California, allegedly kicked a wall. A staff member decided to restrain the child by placing him on the ground, prone on his stomach, they held him for an hour. He died two days later.

On April 18th, 2012, Corey Foster, a sixteen-year-old boy in New York, was playing basketball in the school's gym. Staff members asked him to leave the court he became agitated and; in response, four staff members then restrained him on the gym floor, he went into cardiac arrest and died.

Sadly this is just a couple cases. There are many more children who have been hurt and killed with the use of restraint and seclusion. The injuries and trauma extend to staff working with these students as well. We can do better for our children and staff. I support the house bill in Maryland HB 1166!

Lisa Stephens
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