

February 22, 2021



Dear Chairman Eborsole and Distinguished Committee:

I write to you today to testify to my immense support for House Bill 1166.

As a parent of a handsome, talented, athletic, and also autistic learner in Maryland schools, there are not strong enough words to describe to you the trauma my family has endured because of a one-time restraint in 6th grade as Sam was pleasantly refusing to enter a math class because of heightened anxiety. When staff attempted to escort him to a seclusion room, he eloped and took a jog around the school. Three staff subdued him and restrained him onto the ground. We were called to pick him up, and the next day asked to sign a consent for restraint and seclusion form. I did not.

Also the next day, my son as I knew him was gone. Sam's development was regressed to preverbal and he was presenting as aggressive, self injurious, and unable to attend school, feed himself, read, write, or self care at all. We were able to switch placements quickly into an autism specific program that better met his needs in public school and his social/emotional status became more stable.

Still with kindergarten level reading and writing in 8th grade which had plummeted from his 4th grade level progress as tested in the 6th grade. I then hired a lawyer and we were granted a nonpublic placement wherein he progressed by three grade levels in the first year -- having the appropriate supports in place finally!

I promised Sam that I would dedicate my advocacy to seeing teachers trained to better serve kids like him so this trauma can't touch so many families. So I joined The Alliance Against Seclusion and Restraint and will continue this work until we see policies pass that protect our kids.

Supports like HB1166 provides -- *clinical staff* for therapeutic counseling and learning, as well as crisis. Staff trained in *progressively preventative strategies* that use trauma informed techniques and social emotional learning opportunities for tools everyone uses for crisis prevention. The nonpublic school carefully *tracks and analyzes my son's data* to better plan for ways to help him regulate his anxiety level. With these practices in place, Sam has never had another restraint or seclusion in three years.

As you listen to/read other testimony and hear about the thousands of incidences of restraint and seclusions across Maryland, please know that these are families like mine that have been or will be impacted for years and years due to these harmful practices.

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If the personal stories don't do it strongly enough, the data is calling for a policy change loud and clear. To have nearly 80% of all students restrained be Black, Brown, and/or disabled is a social problem played out in the school-to-prison pipeline that I know you are all familiar with. Please help families and children by delivering a favorable vote advancing this bill to the next reading.

Warm regards,

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