

February 22, 2021

Dear Honorable Committee Members,

I'm writing today to express my highest level of support of the House Bill 1166 as it adds protective support to the most vulnerable children in Maryland, and their families.

I am a 25-year teacher with a Master's degree in Elementary Education and certification in Special Ed. I started out working at a residential treatment facility in Maryland, trained to restrain small children who had been traumatised and were not able to attend school for various psychological/behavioral reasons.

I saw first hand the way restraint and seclusion re-traumatizes and does not promote trust and safety in a school setting. It seemed like a never-ending cycle of traumatization and made me NEVER want to work in a setting where I might have to restrain or seclude a child, so I took my highly qualified credentials to an independent school.

This bill supports the need for higher qualified staffing and training for teachers in alternative practices to restraint and seclusion -- current best practices like Trauma Informed Curricula and Social Emotional Learning strategies in education need to be cultivated in order to proactively and preventatively eliminate seclusion and restraint to the greatest extent possible. It's time to update higher education for student teachers to include CURRENT BEST PRACTICES.

Where there is truly a life or death situation, of course there is little to do but physically stop a child from hurting self or others, but unfortunately, I know many teachers and situations over the years where kids are being secluded and restrained for minor infractions like noncompliance.

HB1166 strengthens safety measures and honors the schoolhouse integrity with careful consideration of highly trained clinical staff required to be present during restraint and seclusion events. This is what a high quality intervention looks like. HB1166 also supports the Kirwin Commission's finding that funding should be allocated for fully staffed schools according to student needs. While that may be a gray area in today's session, there is a continuity of that staffing need as evidenced by the provision of this bill.

Please deliver a favorable vote to advance this bill. I've seen the unnecessary trauma and familial damage these practices create. Just a one-time restraint can re-wire a child's brain and cause permanent changes in behavior and development. It seems to be a self-defeating response by staff to restrain and seclude. Please help us teachers, parents, children and their communities improve the safety of their school environments. We all deserve better!

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