



February 20, 2021

Maryland House of Delegates
6 Bladen St.
Annapolis, MD. 21401

In Support of HB 1166: Education - Restraint and Seclusion – Requirements, Reporting and Training.

Members of the Maryland House Ways and Means, Early Childhood subcommittee.

As a parent and advocate for persons with disabilities, I can't help but support bill HB 1166. Having a child who was restrained and secluded due to his disabilities, for not following the steps outlined in his IEP with fidelity by his school team more times than I care to count in both the elementary and middle school setting here in Anne Arundel County. Restraint and Seclusion are outdated crisis management techniques still used in Maryland Schools across the state. There is a better way to deescalate children in crisis or just simply having a bad day. It's time for changes like the ones being proposed in HB 1166.

My son has over the years in public school become so anxious and frustrated by his learning environment that he has tried to hurt himself on several occasions. I try to imagine a situation where the school personnel would not just drag him down a hallway and lock him in an admin office to "calm down". But rather have staff, on the premises, that could help and aid by treating him like a human being, and not like a problem. Instead, these school personnel could use positive behavioral interventions (strategies and supports) that are both evidence-based and trauma-informed in their approaches to crisis management.

The scenario I described above plays out in schools all across our state and our nation every day. Individuals with mental challenges or disabilities become so frantic that they make bad decisions, resulting in physical harm, trauma - further mental harm, hand cuffs, arrests and in some cases death.

Too many times our children are locked into rooms, with names like the "calm" room, "cooling off" room, "time out" room. It's a form of solitary confinement, called "seclusion" in education settings. It is inhumane way to treat any individual that may be in a state of mental crisis. Worse yet is the option of having a child pinned to the floor by grown adults, causing physical harm to the child, the adults and leaving lasting mental scars due to the use of "restraint" techniques. These are the terms used in schools, when referring to seclusion and restraint. Make no mistake, there is a better way to treat our children with disabilities.

Crisis management techniques like Ukeru offer modern, science-based approaches which also include trauma-informed practices which in many cases replaces any need for antiquated approaches like seclusion and restraint. These modern techniques help to guarantee brighter education outcomes and reduce any need for crisis management techniques. Let's help train the next generation of educators in these proven, modern techniques so that we can educate rather than simply manage children with challenging behaviors due to their disabilities. Please help by supporting programs like this that put the skills in the hands of people that can help and have a positive impact within our communities statewide.

Please support HB 1166. Thank you for your time and your consideration of my testimony today.

Mr. Richard Ceruolo

Parent and advocate for persons living with disabilities | Parent Advocacy Consortium