

HOUSE BILL- 226-SELF-CONTAINED SPECIAL EDUCATION CLASSROOM-USE OF VIDEO RECORDING DEVICES

POSITION: SUPPORT

HEARING WAYS AND MEANS 2/3/22

To our Maryland Delegates:

My name is Michele Pulaski and my daughter Sarah suffered a brain injury due to meningitis at only 6 weeks old. We were told she wouldn't survive and if she did, she would not have any quality of life. Thank goodness the doctors were wrong about a lot of things. She is the sweetest 14 year old girl but, has had many challenges of course. Sarah is mostly non-verbal and in a wheelchair due to her brain injury. She also suffers from epilepsy and visual impairment.

Over the years in the Montgomery County school system, we have had many wonderful moments. Unfortunately, we have also had a lot of scary moments and events happen at school where we had no idea what happened. Sarah is not able to tell me anything about her day and because she is in a wheelchair she is really at the mercy of who is responsible for taking care of her. In elementary school, she was coming home with bruises and scratches on a fairly regular basis during 4th grade and we were not given any explanation as to how it happened. I would send Sarah to school without any marks and she would come back with new marks so I knew it was happening at school.

In addition, during 5th grade there was an incident where my daughter started choking on a pretzel. Sarah does not eat pretzels due to her swallowing issues. I asked how she got a pretzel and the staff wasn't sure. Someone responsible for her care was not watching her and without anyone noticing, she got a hold of a pretzel. It took over a day to find out that another child in the class had pretzels and somehow Sarah got a hold of one. She is in a wheelchair so no one was able to piece together what happened. Upon choking, the staff tried the Heimlich maneuver and it didn't work. Sarah then pushed her body into the table in front of her and luckily the pretzel dislodged. This was a life-threatening situation that no one was able to figure out how it truly happened.

Special needs children like Sarah have no protection from neglect or abuse. Although, I have had some great interactions with Montgomery County Public Schools, this is one area that is still of concern since she started school. Kids like Sarah have no voice and no way to protect themselves or discuss with their parents what is happening to them in school during the day.

As parents of children like Sarah, we have enough worries about our children without having to worry about their safety and well-being at school. Please consider passing this bill that would allow cameras in special contained special education classrooms in MD.

Thank you for your attention

-Michele Pulaski

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