

Dustin Bane
1461 Dockside Ct
Frederick, MD 21701
(240) 446-3496 / dbane101@gmail.com

House Bill 226/ Public Schools- Self-Contained Special Education Classrooms-Use of Video Recording Devices Position:

Support

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I am the father of an autistic child that is non-verbal and is in the Frederick County Expressions program at Carroll Manor Elementary (CMES). I am in support of this bill to ensure camera surveillance occurs in self-contained special education classrooms as the incidence of abuse to our most vulnerable students often goes without mitigation.

As you may be aware, there was a significant investigation into multiple allegations of abuse of special needs children in the Expressions program at CMES from 2016-2019. During this same time period, in 2019, my son came home with a bruise over 4 inches in diameter in the center of his back. Significant enough someone should've been aware of an incident as it would have been a significant blunt injury.

To this day, I have no idea how this occurred. I experience fear, anxiety and even shame for sending him back to school each day without knowing what happened and whether he's being abused. But I can't even begin to imagine the feelings a child who cannot verbalize what is happening to him would feel everyday as he returns. Cameras would help provide the voice for my son to protect him from harm, proof for teachers who may get falsely accused due to these same communication problems, and peace of mind for myself when I send my little guy off to school.

Neurotypical, verbal children have the security of knowing that they have teachers, administrators, principals and guardians that protect them that they can go to and tell them of any incidents. A non-verbal child does not have these protections. An environment that does not equally provide that same sense of security to children that are nonverbal is not a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) that is promised to our children. Special needs children incur abuse at much higher rates than neurotypical children and yet we are providing them less security.

House Bill 226 will provide protections for both students and staff and provide evidence in camera surveillance needed to assist local CPS/authorities, administration and investigators when an incident has been reported. Please support this bill to ensure protections for our most vulnerable students and staff.

Respectfully,

Dustin Bane