

HOUSE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE

HOUSE BILL 615: Education-Prohibited Behavior on School Grounds and Property-Application

February 14, 2024

POSITION: SUPPORT

My name is Lori Taylor and I'm testifying today in support of HB 615 on behalf of my daughter. When my daughter was in her first year of middle school and just 11 years old, a substitute teacher asked her to get out of her seat and go to another assigned seat. This might seem like a simple request, but my daughter has suffered with anxiety for years and the school had a documented Section 504 Plan indicating that if she is called out in front of others, that she tends to shut down. My daughter said nothing but simply froze. The substitute teacher called for administration to come into the classroom and ask her again. When she still didn't move or say a word, he asked the other kids to leave the room and he called the Assistant Principal. It seemed that the Assistant Principal couldn't think of another manner to handle the situation, so she called 911 stating that a student was disrupting school activities and directed my daughter to go to the front office. When 3 officers arrived, my daughter had complied and was walking into the office. The officer asked her why she wasn't listening, and she just shrugged her shoulders and said, "I don't know". She was told to stand up and put her hands behind her back. She was handcuffed, arrested, and charged with "Disturbing School Activities or Personnel." My 11-year-old was taken to the Western District police station and put in a holding cell until I could get to her which was almost 3 hours later since I was working in Virginia that day. Not only was this situation traumatizing for my daughter and myself, but it was confusing to me as her mother. When I questioned the school, they said that they had no idea the police would be arresting her and didn't want that to happen. When I questioned the arresting officer, he told me that when a school calls with this type of report, that they are required to arrest the child. When there are no signs of violence or threatening language used by a student, why is the student's behavior criminalized? Why was my daughter arrested and needlessly injected into the school-to-prison pipeline for disability-related behavior and typical adolescent noncompliance?

My daughter will live with this trauma for the rest of her life because the school wrongly decided that involving the police was their best option and the police were then able to use the charge of "Disturbing School Activities" to criminalize an eleven-year-old child's behavior. It's time to stop allowing children to be charged with "disturbing school activities." It's clear from my daughter's situation that it was not needed and can cause life-long damage to the child.

I strongly support HB 615.

Sincerely,

Lori Taylor
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