

Krystal Emerson

Reference: Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

*Regarding: LD1248: Physical Escort and Restraint and Seclusion of Students in School
4/23/2025*

I am Krystal Emerson from Ellsworth and the mother of five incredible kids. My son, who at just 7 years old, was physically restrained and secluded against his will several times during the 23-24 school year. Each incident amplified his anxiety and emotional dysregulation, increased restraint and seclusion, broke his trust with his teachers, and disregarded his rights to an education and to be treated with respect, dignity, and compassion. Today I testify in opposition to the proposed act, on behalf of my son and our family. Removing crucial threshold safeguards would increase the use of traumatic practices, intensify stress and behaviors in children, and be contrary to the results parents and schools are desperately seeking.

I vividly remember the first call to pick up my son, I had no idea he had been restrained. I walked into a disheveled classroom, to find my son surrounded by 4 adults frantically responding to any movement he attempted to make by body blocking. I had never seen him look so small, terrified, and lost before. It broke me, and it broke him too. Unfortunately, my husband or I would walk into a similar scene at least 17 more times. On numerous occasions, staff interactions and hands on approaches using physical escorts, body or mat blocking, restraint and seclusion intensified our son's anxiety.

Almost 2 years after that first incident he is still visibly shaken by these events. Just yesterday he recounted that he was scared after being restrained or secluded, that every day he worried that it would happen again. He wished he could tell his teachers what they could have done differently to help him, but he says "Momma, I am just a kid, they won't listen to me." His world has become so small since these events. He rarely leaves our home, he has lost contact with friends, and it has negatively impacted his self-esteem. Last week he asked me "Momma, do you think I will grow up to be successful?" I immediately responded yes, because he is smart, funny, kind, and determined!

Think of a time when you have been scared or just having a hard day. What would you need for support? A hug or someone to talk to? How about to be held down or shut in a small room, against your will, by two or more adults twice your size, while you screamed for help. No? So, why are we doing this to our children? This must stop.

This bill is not a suitable solution, it would have significant adverse effects on thousands of children, including my son, who face challenges in environments that are not designed for their needs. Children need appropriate and effective support from trained and compassionate professionals. We must explore alternatives that ask why a child may be struggling **before** escalation, and in partnership with the child themselves. We must provide schools with **adequate resources** (i.e. staff, educational techs, service providers), **proper training** (i.e.

trauma-informed, collaborative proactive solutions), and **creative means to meet school standards** (i.e. hands-on and interactive engagement). Lastly, guidelines should include accountability for schools and staff that engage in improper uses of restraint and seclusion.

Let's do better - For our children, for our community, and for our schools.

Thank you for your consideration of my concerns and alternative solutions, I appreciate your attention.

Sincerely,

Krystal Emerson