

"Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy and other members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee,

My name is Victoria Duguay and I work in MSAD 11 as an elementary school principal at River View Community School and I live in Waterville. I am here today to testify in support of LD 1248.

As an advocate for student well-being and inclusive education, I respectfully submit this testimony in support of allowing trained staff to physically escort a dysregulated student to a designated safe room when necessary, as part of a comprehensive support plan. This measure is not punitive, but rather a compassionate and structured response to ensure the safety, dignity, and emotional regulation of a student experiencing extreme distress.

There are moments when a student with sensory, emotional, or behavioral challenges, becomes overwhelmed to the point where verbal de-escalation strategies and environmental modifications are no longer effective. In these instances, the option to guide a student with a calm, non-restrictive physical escort to a quiet, safe space is vital to prevent harm and provide a consistent, supportive response.

Let me share one story. I have worked directly with a student who, when dysregulated, exhibits behaviors such as punching, spitting, kicking, pulling hair, and screaming at the top of their lungs. These incidents have occurred in common spaces such as the hallway, where multiple classrooms can see and hear the episode unfold. The other students—many of whom had never experienced trauma or extreme behaviors before entering school—have been visibly shaken. Teachers quickly close classroom doors to shield students, and classroom services like art, access to the cafeteria, resource room instruction, and gym are suspended due to the dysregulated student being in the hallway refusing to go to a quiet space. Students in these classrooms now go on high alert anytime their classroom doors are closed unexpectedly.

These incidents don't just affect the dysregulated student; they impact the entire school environment. Peer relationships are strained, and students who have not experienced trauma before, now have. Over time, this erodes the sense of psychological safety that is critical for all students to learn and thrive.

When verbal interventions and environmental supports fail, a trained, calm, and compassionate physical escort to a quiet and designated safe room allows staff to de-escalate the student away from public view. This not only protects the dignity of the student in crisis, but also restores order and a sense of safety for the broader student body.

This practice should be implemented alongside a robust network of support services including access to the school social worker, a teacher the student trusts, and individualized sensory strategies that help the student regulate. Staff should be trained in trauma-informed practices and de-escalation techniques to ensure that any physical guidance is respectful, gentle, and consistent with the student's needs and rights.

In conclusion, allowing the physical escort of a dysregulated student to a safe space—when done with care and as part of a larger therapeutic framework, keeps everyone safe while protecting the student's dignity.

Respectfully submitted,
Victoria Duguay
Principal River View Community School/MSAD 11
4/23/25