

Crystal Davis  
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Hello Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, my name is Crystal Davis of Hartland, Maine. Thank you for taking the time to hear just a small fragment of how our family has been affected by these issues. I fully support this bill as a mother of four boys with special needs. All four of my children have varying degrees of Autism, Attention Hyperactivity Deficit Disorder, and other individual diagnoses in addition.

Life with special needs can be more than challenging. A rollercoaster of emotions, overwhelming sensory input, a sheer lack of understanding for the world around us. Our world is often black and white with very rigid beliefs. This is particularly true for our twelve year old son, Zander.

Zander is the most bright-eyed, caring little boy you will ever meet with a passion for Pokemon, cooking, and empathy for others. He's currently a sixth grader in the Functional Life Skills Program at Nokomis Regional Middle School in Newport, Maine. Throughout the past three years Zander has attended school through District RSU 19 and his fourth grade year at Bangor Regional Program, he's been subjected to well over 50 seclusions and restraints. Those restraints were limited timelines from the 2018-2019 school year and from approximately October 2019 to March of 2020 when the pandemic closed schools.

These seclusions and restraints were used as results of what the schools consider "unsafe behaviors" including verbal and physical aggression. This is more than 10 times the amount of restraints we've had to partake in at home. The problematic system within schools begins with the lack of training for staff, the lack of patience for children with special needs, and a general misunderstanding of how our children function. As a result of these restraints, seclusions, and transports, my son suffered physical and emotional harm that lead to my need to file a police report and report the abuse to the Department of Health and Human Services.

The staff that work with our children, specifically in the special education classrooms have historically, been prompted to provoke these "unsafe behaviors." They're taught to make the kids "learn coping strategies" through the behaviors. This is not acceptable by any means!

In an event that took place back on September 11, 2020, my amazing little boy, used his words to voice a genuine concern to his Ed Tech. For 12 minutes, my son pleaded with the Ed Tech not to "ruin his belongings." The Ed Tech, Chip Littlefield proceeded to write on my child's scissors with a permanent marker, regardless of the fact they were already properly labeled by myself prior to school.

So the Autistic Meltdown began. When they provoked him to the point of escalation and "unsafe behaviors" when he couldn't control himself anymore, they restrained him and secluded him in a small room until my fiancé and I arrived. As a result of the meltdown, Zander was suspended for 10 days. When I challenged the circumstances with the Director of Special Education, Liz Mares, the Superintendent Mike Hammer, then suspended him for another 45 days.

When he was supposed to return to school in December, they filed Due Process to keep him out even longer. He was not able to successfully participate in any education or therapies that he so desperately needs. He finally returned to an abbreviated day last Monday.

The schools use our children's behavior as an excuse. These staff members are not properly trained to handle the situations they entice. Our children are being punished for having feelings and told they can't express them or suffer the consequences of being held and shut away!

I firmly believe seclusions and restraints should not be allowed in any educational program, public or private. All staff needs to be taught crisis intervention techniques to prevent these escalations. Give our children time to process the information you

give them. Give them space to have their feelings and acknowledge them in healthy ways. Give them a sense of individuality and choices. Even just a few minutes to sit and think can be the difference between the need for seclusions or restraints and receiving an education they can nurture and trust without physical and emotional harm.

I have so much more to share. I would be willing to offer more insight on our challenges and some of the suggestions of how to better support our children with anyone who wishes to do so. Thank you again!