

To Whom It Concerns,

I currently serve as the site administrator for a Level IV behavioral program serving students with diverse needs from kindergarten through age 22. Our team is deeply committed to reducing the use of physical restraint and seclusion to the greatest extent possible. Like most professionals in similar roles, we prioritize proactive, preventive strategies to help students regulate, because we genuinely care about their well-being. If we did not, we would not be doing this work. We recognize physical holds or seclusion damages relationships we work so hard to build, and will require extensive repair work to be completed with the child after.

At the same time, I must emphasize the critical importance of protecting our staff. The intensity and frequency of significant behaviors we encounter daily require that we ensure our teachers and paraprofessionals feel safe coming to work. Staff who feel regulated and supported are far better equipped to make thoughtful, compassionate, and effective decisions for students resulting in a reduction of elevated behaviors. Conversely, when staff are consistently fearful of injury or harm, the likelihood of positive outcomes diminishes for everyone involved, we stand a greater chance of elevating the student when we are elevated. Mirror neurons provide a neurological basis for understanding why behavior, emotion, and self-regulation can be contagious, underscoring the importance of modeling calm and respectful interactions—particularly for students with behavioral or emotional needs. We need to find a way to ensure our teachers and school staff feel safe, whenever possible.

Our building utilizes the Ukeru approach, which has significantly improved feelings of safety for both staff and students. As a result, the use of physical holds has been greatly reduced. For many of our older secondary students, we also rely on law enforcement support rather than physical restraint when safety risks escalate, again to prevent injury to staff or students. This approach reflects our commitment to minimizing harm while maintaining clear and necessary safety boundaries.

It is also important to acknowledge the statewide shortage of qualified special education teachers. I am concerned that continuing to remove safety protections and tools without viable alternatives will only exacerbate this issue. Trauma is real, and students should never be placed in isolation unless there are no other safe options available. However, educators also deserve to feel safe in their workplace. In some situations, seclusion remains the safest option to protect both the student and staff.

School districts must retain reasonable, well-regulated avenues to address serious safety concerns. Without practical alternatives, eliminating these measures entirely will lead to increased risk, greater staff burnout, and ultimately, the loss of dedicated professionals from an already strained field.

Thank you for your time,

Ivy Jorgenson

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