

Dear Members of the Seclusion Working Group,

Thank you for inviting public input as you consider changes to state law around the use of seclusion in schools. I am writing from the perspective of a school principal who leads a Setting IV special education program serving students with significant emotional and behavioral needs.

I want to be very clear: seclusion should only be used as a last resort. In my school, it is not a routine strategy, it is not a preference, and it is not taken lightly. It is used only in moments when a student is at immediate risk of seriously hurting themselves or someone else, and only after other supports and de-escalation strategies have been tried or are no longer safe.

I am concerned about proposals that would completely eliminate seclusion by a certain date without first ensuring that schools like mine have well-funded, fully-implemented alternatives in place.

In a Setting IV program, we work with students who are more prone to crisis and are working to develop the skills to regulate their behavior in extreme moments. When those moments occur, staff must make split-second decisions to keep everyone safe. If a safety tool is removed before replacements are ready, the result is not fewer crises—it is fewer safe options during crises.

From my experience, removing seclusion without adequate preparation and support would lead to outcomes no one wants: increased physical restraint, more calls to law enforcement, students being sent home or excluded from school, and higher rates of injury to both students and staff. These outcomes undermine the very goals we are trying to achieve—safety, dignity, and access to education.

At this time, school districts are navigating many requirements that are not fully funded, and each additional mandate stretches staff and resources further. Safety systems cannot simply be turned off without carefully building something better in their place.

If staff believe that critical safety options are being removed without proven alternatives in place, many will choose not to enter this work—or will leave it. Increased risk of injury, combined with the feeling that safety decisions are being made far from the classroom, makes it harder to build and sustain a stable, experienced workforce. High turnover ultimately harms students, who rely on consistent, trusting relationships to make progress.

I respectfully urge the Working Group to consider one of two approaches:

- Maintain the current rules, continuing to allow seclusion as a tightly regulated emergency measure; or

- Adopt a gradual, supported transition, where the state first provides the resources, training, and technical assistance needed to implement proven alternatives, and only then moves toward further restrictions or elimination.

As a principal, my responsibility is to ensure that every student and every staff member leaves school safe each day. Removing a last-resort safety option before viable alternatives are fully in place shifts risk rather than reducing it—and that risk is borne by the students we serve and the adults who support them.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of this issue and for the care you are taking with decisions that have very real consequences in real schools.

Best,

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