



December 11, 2009

Congressman George Miller
Chairman
House Education and Labor Committee
2181 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Congresswoman Cathy McMorris Rodgers
1323 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Miller and Congresswoman McMorris Rodgers,

On behalf of the National Autism Association, I thank you for introducing HR 4247, the Preventing Harmful Restraint and Seclusion in Schools Act. This federal legislation is desperately needed to protect the safety and human rights of all schoolchildren, many of whom are diagnosed with autism. As an organization dedicated to advocating for the rights of all affected by autism, we are in full support of this legislation to end dangerous restraint and seclusion practices in our schools.

Autism now affects one in 91 children in this country. Many of our children are unable to speak and cannot report or describe what transpires at school. Lack of federal regulations protecting schoolchildren from harmful restraint and seclusion has resulted in horrifying situations amounting to physical and mental abuse. Acts that are unthinkable are being perpetrated on our children with greater frequency, and the results are dire. We read increasingly of children being tied and duct-taped to desks, locked repeatedly and for prolonged periods of time in closets, denied food and water, and the list goes on. At a minimum, these practices cause trauma and regression to children with autism, and in many cases they have lead to serious physical injury and even death.

The restraint and seclusion trend now seen in schools from all parts of the country is simply unacceptable and cannot be allowed to continue. We support the passage of this legislation as an effective start in addressing these disturbing and inhumane practices in our school systems nationwide.

Again, thank you for standing up for the rights of our nation's children by introducing HR 4247. Its enactment will provide a voice for those who cannot speak for themselves.

Sincerely,

Rita C. Shreffler
Executive Director

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