

# CAFETY

Community Alliance for the Ethical Treatment of Youth

December 23, 2009  
The Honorable George Miller  
2205 Rayburn House Office Building  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Miller:

As members of the Community Alliance for the Ethical Treatment of Youth (CAFETY) we applaud the introduction of H.R. 4247, and we are in full support of the recommended legislation.

As survivors of schools and adolescent residential programs that make use of restraint and seclusion we recognize the critical importance of this legislation in making public and private schools safe places for learning, growth, and development. Children have a right to be protected from abuse at all times. This includes the right to learning environments that are safe and supportive. Learning can only be encouraged when the threat of violence by those entrusted to educate and protect students is removed. Restraint and seclusion do not offer that protection; they work against it and violate the rights and dignity of the human person.

The risks of restraint and seclusion (including death) are well-documented. These risks exist for all children and adolescents, but the disproportionate use of restraint and seclusion on our most vulnerable students is all the more disturbing. Restraint and seclusion are most often used against children struggling with mental health challenges, behavioral challenges, and other disabilities. These are among the most powerless of students. It is deeply troubling that their vulnerabilities are routinely responded to with violence and force in the very spaces that are expected to promote their education, growth, and development.

The Preventing Harmful Restraint and Seclusion in Schools Act recognizes the dangers associated with restraint and seclusion practices. It recommends the use of school-wide Positive Behavior Support (PBS) as a proven, evidence-based approach that supports students who struggle with meeting behavioral expectations within a school setting. School-wide PBS encourages students to develop more effective strategies for managing their emotions leading to more positive behaviors.

School-wide PBS emphasizes systems of support that include proactive strategies for teaching appropriate student behaviors to create positive school environments. It is an application of a behaviorally-based systems approach to enhance the capacity of schools, families, and communities to design effective environments that improve the link between research-validated practices and the environments in which teaching and learning occurs. Attention is focused on creating and sustaining primary school-wide, classroom, and individual systems of support that improve personal, health, social, family, work, recreation experiences for all by making targeted behaviors less effective, efficient, and relevant, and desired behavior more functional.

As members of CAFETY we are committed to ending unnecessary restraint and seclusion practices and to guaranteeing that all schools (residential and day) are safe for students and committed to promoting success in a supportive environment through the implementation of school-wide PBS. We commend you for your proactive approach by not only championing legislation that condemns the inappropriate use of restraint and seclusion, but by introducing measures that would promote a safe, positive and effective approach to responding to the diverse challenges facing our nation's schools. We look forward to working with you and your staff to secure its timely enactment.

Sincerely,



Kathryn Whitehead  
Executive Director  
Community Alliance for the Ethical Treatment of Youth

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