

Jamie Harthan

## Testimony in Support of House File 3482

My son, Mason, is a ten year-old boy on the Autism Spectrum. We've lived in Two Harbors for about nine years now. He goes to school in Cloquet, which is an hour away. He has been traveling through three counties to get to school for three years now. For two years, I had to drive him because our home district, Two Harbors placed Mason there, but did not get a driver and was not prepared for Fridays since our home district has Fridays off. Our district shares special education services with twelve other districts in surrounding areas. They placed a level four school in the "middle" of all these districts, even though my son has the longest drive.

We love this school, not because of it being a level four, but because of the inclusion of it, which could happen anywhere. The school still secludes Mason from the kids in our community or the others that he will eventually be going to school with. When I raise my concerns, I hear responses like "you should move somewhere else." The last IEP meeting that was held in Two Harbors and the Superintendent brought maps to show me where I should consider moving. I had two advocates with me and this meeting and we were stunned by this. Additionally, Mason was at this meeting for over three hours and had no behavior issues.

Mason has gone to four different schools. He is now in fifth grade. He started out school at a place called North Woods Little Learners where he learned emotions besides angry and happy. It was also an hour away from our house, it was worthwhile. When Mason was ready to graduate from that program, the school worked really hard to get him the supports he would need in his home school. However, the school refused to try anything. They said they wanted to see what happens. This is when Mason began being excluded. He was not allowed to attend music class or be part of concerts. I have never seen my son in a music program.

In first grade, we tried another school. He lasted fourteen days before he was expelled for behaviors. They had a special "sensory room" that had nothing in it and was the equivalent to a jail cell. My son will still freak out about things that happened there or start crying because he does not know why he was asked to leave. We finished the school year out barely making it through back in Two Harbors. Again, no music or field trips.

Second grade is when things really got bad. When Mason started second grade, they put his desk in a closet in his classroom. I have pictures attached of this with a swing, and his "calm down room." This room was the Guidance Counselor's office, where he would get in trouble for touching things. Mason was barely in his classroom and missed out on so much learning and social activities. There was an ice cream competition the school held, and Mason's class won because he brought in so many box tops but he was not allowed to be a part of it. There was another field trip to Wolf Ridge that Mason was not even invited to, and I only found out about it when my coworker asked if I wanted to carpool assuming Mason would be included on the trip. When I asked the school about the Wolf Ridge trip, they said that it was not safe for Mason to go. After Christmas, Mason's behavior escalated and so did the restraints, holds, and police calls. From about January until March, Mason was put in eight holds and then sent home. It was about once a week, with a four-day school week. I watched my son slowly

decline, hate police officers, and cry about going to school. This was not my son at school, and they kept refusing help. Finally I pulled him out. I covered all my bases to be prepared if I had to go to Court for truancy. On April 28, 2017, I received a letter from the school saying they were working with the county to put my son into an institution or place him in the level four in Cloquet. I remember this day well because I was supposed to have a meeting with the school, but had to cancel because my aunt who was diagnosed with cancer three weeks prior, had died and I needed to be there. I was reading that letter as I watched her get taken out of her house.

Mason is still currently in that level four in Cloquet. Since starting at that school, he has been not been in restraints, but has been secluded a few times. We have also still had a lot of issues with our home district because they placed him in this school, but do not provide transportation. We have no adaptive programs in our area for kids like Mason, so in order for him to be a part of anything, he would have to spend most of his day in a car. This means Mason, and many kids like him, are secluded from kids in our community and opportunities most kids get. He is supposed to come back here next year, but I cannot imagine doing that. We are now considering placing Mason in home school, which only further secludes him. If we do not have laws in place, restraints and seclusions will just keep harming kids, even though the both restraints and seclusions have been proven ineffective.