

Good evening, members of the Public Safety Finance and Policy Committee,

My name is Anna Heinzerling. I am a clinical social worker, and currently a fellow in the Minnesota Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental Disabilities (MN LEND) program. I am also Autistic. I am writing about the most recent Minnesota legislation on the use of restraints in schools.

Since I was a teenager, I have worked with youth with emotional and behavioral disabilities in various settings including schools and residential programs, both in Minnesota and on the East Coast. In these settings, when kids were trying to cause harm to themselves or others, we sometimes had to use our bodies to restrain them.

Even in the most warranted of circumstances, restraining a child was never pleasant— the children would often scream, yell that we were hurting them, cry out for friends or loved ones, and in certain cases even wet themselves. These were the same kids who, earlier that day, I had been helping solve a math problem, or listening to talk about Pokemon.

Though there was always training for staff on how to safely restrain youth, it was easy to see how restraints could be misused. For example, adults could restrain a child due to their own anger, restrain them for invalid causes, or use faulty methods that could more easily result in injury.

Nationwide, and in Minnesota specifically, there are concerns about disproportionalities in the use of these physical holds. The most recent pre-Covid numbers from the Civil Rights Data Collection showed that even though students with disabilities represented only 17% of students in Minnesota public schools, they represented 93% percent of those who were restrained. Moreover, students who were restrained were also disproportionately boys, and students who identified as Black or African American. According to data from the Department of Education, while only 11.8 percent of Minnesota special education students are Black, they account for 27 percent of those subjected to physical holds. These numbers concern me as a professional, as a disabled individual, and as a human being who values the lives of the most vulnerable.

The legislation passed in 2023, while likely not enough to be a full solution to these concerns, was a large step forward in creating more accountability for school and adjacent staff in terms of reporting. It also provided more regulation around prone restraints, which are the most dangerous of restraints.

According to several research studies, nearly all restraints have negative effects on the psychological well-being of students and staff, and many on the physical well-being. Allowing easier access to prone restraints will increase the likelihood of these irreversible consequences. They restrict breathing in situations where students already have raised heart rates from being in fight or flight mode<sup>1</sup>. Prone restraints have been banned in prisons and in hospitals. There is no reason they should be allowed for children in schools.

Please do not rewrite the laws to put our most vulnerable children at greater risk.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Anna Heinzerling

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<sup>1</sup> Nunno, M.A., McCabe, L.A., Izzo, C.V. *et al.* A 26-Year Study of Restraint Fatalities Among Children and Adolescents in the United States: A Failure of Organizational Structures and Processes. *Child Youth Care Forum* 51, 661–680 (2022). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10566-021-09646-w>