Dear House Committee Members,

I am sharing our story to support HB1813. Physical restraint, seclusion and segregation at school must be stopped. We are needlessly damaging our youngest children and perpetuating the school to prison pipeline. We are destroying natural curiosity and desire to learn at the youngest of ages. Please pass this bill. It is a strong starting point. The use of the SROs, (School Resource Officers), to get around restrictions on physical and mechanical restraint at school must also be stopped.

This is our story.

4th grade:
"I can't go back to school. I don't feel safe at school. I'm not afraid of the kids, Mom, I'm afraid of losing control. I don't trust the teachers and staff. They don't know how to help me stay calm. They make me angry when I am controlling my rage, and then I lose that control. I get in trouble, you or dad have to leave work and lose money, and I get in trouble at home too."

This is what my son told me after his first full blown panic attack. It was the morning of his first day at his new school. We changed schools on the unanimous recommendation of his 2, (state and local), advocates, after my son was traumatized by use of unwarranted mechanical and physical restraint methods in the 2017-2018 school year. We were advised by those advocates that my son was being triggered by staff nearly 50% of the time and was developing more maladaptive behaviors as a result. The following was the pivotal traumatic incident that led us to this point. The incidents almost always stemmed from "defiance", which was actually the freeze portion of his fight or flight response. Staff would force the issue, usually academic tasks, (even though he was very successful academically, scoring 97th to 99th percentile in standardized testing year after year), while my child was already shut down by his anxiety, and thus trigger him from freeze into fight/flight.

In November 2017, a para observed friendly finger poking among a small group of students who were messing around during music class. The teacher was never aware of the situation at all. The students were directed to stop by the para. My son took 2 prompts more than the other students before he stopped. (Typical of a child with ADHD.) He did stop, and there was no escalation or aggression among peers, they were just having fun. "The rule is hands to self", was all that needed to be said!

Per my son's IEP, the undesired activity was noted on his daily point sheet and addressed at his end of day check-out with his case manager. The Special Ed case manager began the conversation by referring to an "incident" in music and referencing "a physical behavior" as well as stating this could be seen as "unsafe behavior". These are trigger words for my son, so he became mildly dysregulated by the belief that he was now in big trouble for an uneventful social interaction he had enjoyed. He felt he had been included in a successful, positive peer interaction, (an area where my son struggles). I am aware that this is not an uncommon interaction among his peers, in spite of the "hands to self" rule. Upset by this, he pounded a fist

on a table and turned his body away from the teacher to calm, using one of his taught strategies. Instead of allowing him time to calm, praising use of a tool and connecting before redirecting, the case manager advised him that since he was upset he could go home and they could meet to discuss it in the morning.

Such things are to be processed at end of day per his IEP, due to slow emotional processing. That way, he can go home to calm and process after the correction. My son agreed to meet in the morning to review his point sheet, but stated there was "nothing to discuss about music because nothing happened."

By morning, the issue had been escalated to include the principal and I was summoned at drop off to join them. Again, this was mutual playful finger poking that did not escalate. The case manager began as before, using the trigger language stated above. My son stated in response, through gritted teeth, but calmly, that "nothing happened". The principal then asked if he had been upset or angry when it happened. The case manager spoke up that they didn't think that. My son responded anyway with "No, I wasn't upset, we were just messing around, having fun. Nothing happened, duh!" Minutes of silence followed after which my son stood and walked to the door. I asked where he was going and in a calm voice, he said "to class, we're done here. This is stupid."

The principal stated, "See, this is what we are dealing with! We need to call him back down and hold him accountable." The Case Manager said "Yeah. He still owes me that check out time, too." His check out time was 10 minutes and this had taken 30 minutes. I replied with a question. "Maybe you clarified with him before I joined you, but what did you need from him just now?" I was told "He needed to listen and say OK." I was familiar with the WFPS mantra of "listen, say OK and do it right away". Yet, he had listened and answered the question asked. He had waited and left calmly. (I am aware this issue was not addressed with the other students involved.) There was no escalated incident or aggressive behavior. The rule “hands to self” should have simply been reviewed and the matter dropped.

I had to go to work and asked if they could just discuss the disrespect, his use of "duh!", at his next check-in an hour later. The case manager replied "if he even comes to his check-in now". I mused silently, but incredulously, over why he might possibly not want to attend these check-ins. I reminded them his team was meeting the next day and stated we could discuss it then as I needed to rush to work. I asked them to just let him get through the day.

After I left, the principal asked the Student Teacher to tell my son that I was in the office and he needed to come down. My son knew I was at work, so he refused. He correctly assumed this was still regarding the peer interaction of the prior day, and was trying to stay calm to get through his day. The SRO was called, and the classroom teacher was advised to take the class to the library and bring books as they needed to separate my son for this defiance. Seeing the SRO, principal and case manager, my son attempted to stay with his class and go to the library. The staff blocked his way with their bodies. (If my son blocked others with his body that would be considered physical aggression, just for the record.) This was now in the presence of his

peers.

He eventually tried to push his way by the adults and was then placed in a hold against the wall. He continued to struggle and a soft lockdown was called for the whole school. (What?!? He was already restrained! His peers correctly assumed the lock down was about my son, adding to his social challenges.) He was then placed in a prone restrain on the floor, with a knee in his back. My son then bit the SRO's wrist, in full fight or flight mode, as he tried to get away. The knee on his back was hurting him. He was carried, feet dragging, or transported, to the OT room. This was supposed to be his safe space for breaks, used for him to calm. There is a door with a window, and per his plan, the protocol is to leave him in the room and allow him to calm, with all focus on de-escalation. He was never one to self harm. The SRO did not leave the room. My son screamed for him to leave, get out, go away, let him be, leave him alone... Failing that, he began throwing objects at the SRO.

My son's father arrived to this scene and knew nothing of the situation. I was in session with clients and unaware of the situation escalating. The officer, (SRO), asked his father "cuff him?", and his father replied with uncertainty, “yes?" out of deference to authority. (This was asked in ear shot of my son, which has severely damaged the relationship between my son and his father, and never should have been asked or suggested.) My son was then handcuffed, hands behind his back, prone, (face down), on the floor in his safe space, sobbing until he threw up. No one has been able to tell me how long that lasted and no restraint form was filled out. These reports are not required when the SRO restrains a child. Mechanical restraints are not allowed by school staff, but are allowed by the SRO as a contracted service provider, per the information I was given. The SRO is neither expected nor required to uphold the IEP.

No imminent danger existed. This was nowhere near the least toxic response. The SRO could and should have simply left the room and closed the door. There is a window in the door allowing for observation. My son has no history of self harm. The door is not locked and my son does not try to leave the room. He just needs space and a calm place to recover.

After this incident, his anxiety became much more notable. Fight or flight became a more rapid default response. We finished the school year working from home. He had lost his love for learning. My son was 10 and I began homeschooling him for a healing break, with the hope that he would eventually return to public school.

He tried to return to public school in 6th grade with the hope that middle school would be a big enough change and knowing that the SRO involved in that trauma was not associated with the middle school. Sadly, he could not overcome the trauma he endured to succeed in that environment again. The damage could not be undone.

2nd quarter of 6th grade:
"I can't go back to public school. I can't trust the adults at school to help me and not hurt me. I don't think it will ever be the right place for me again."

Please inform yourselves, and those who work with our children in this way, about the detrimental effects of physical restraint, seclusion and taking away lunch and recess. Please learn and teach those adults about the science of brain neuroplasticity and what negative impact fear and punishment or "poking the lizard", (engaging the primitive or reptilian brain of a child during an emotional outburst), have on developing brains. I highly recommend Dr. Ross Greene and his CPS method or Dr. Daniel Siegel, No Drama Discipline. Either of these strategies can be, and in some places already are, readily utilized with children like mine in school.

Thank you for hearing our story. Please help our children and pass this bill into law! Please do not rest on this issue until School Resource Officers are also no longer allowed to circumvent these rules and perpetuate the school to prison pipeline! The first rule should always be "do no harm"!

Respectfully,
Jennifer Nett