



April 10, 2019

Chair Doherty, Members of the Committee:

For the record, my name is Erick Welsh. I serve as the principal at Wheatley School in Portland, and I'm here today to speak with you about SB 963.

Multnomah Education School District's Wheatley School serves over 60 students from 12 districts who have severe cognitive and behavioral challenges. These are tier three students who do not have the behavioral skills required to safely maintain enrollment in other highly supportive special education environments. Examples of the type of challenges our students face include Autism, Other Health Impairment, Emotional Disturbance, and other serious medical issues.

At Wheatley, each student is staffed by at least a 1:1 ratio to support learning and behavior modifications. In order to meet this need, we have a staff of over 90. With the support of a dedicated faculty and related services department, students who otherwise would not be able to attend school, attend and thrive successfully in so many ways. No other school in the state does quite what we are able to do for our students. We are passionate, student focused, safety focused and--most importantly—we strive for excellence in educating and preparing our students for future endeavors including employment.

I understand and am supportive of the intent behind SB 963. I think there is a lot of good in the bill and that it will help support many students. However, I want to share with you the potential for some unintended consequences for a very small portion of our most challenged students.

Many of the students we serve have challenges with communicating their needs and emotions and a portion engage in self-injurious behaviors. As such, our staff are trained in the Safety-Care behavioral safety training system. Safety-Care focuses on proactive de-escalation and waiting strategies, but also trains personnel for crisis eventualities which require a hands-on approach.

I want to be very clear that we only use seclusion or restraints when it is more dangerous for the student or others to *not* do so. The most restrictive restraint that is used is the supine stability hold. When keeping students safe using this method, the arms, legs and head are supported by four to seven staff. No pressure is ever to be applied to the abdomen or joints. This hold is a last resort at the highest level of support and should never be used in a general education environment. It has also been hugely effective and safe for our students, enabling them to refocus and continue on with their daily instruction and scheduling.

I am concerned that inability to ever utilize the supine restraint may exclude a small portion of certain students from a school experience. The type of student who immediately comes to mind is "Joe." Joe has been with us for 3 ½ years. He is a sophomore who has autism and communication challenges with frustration that result in violent attacks on students and staff. He has 2 highly trained staff at all times, who are able to call for backup to keep the student and others safe with a supine stability hold in only the most extreme circumstances. We are currently able to serve Joe in a setting where he is around his peers, gets to go to school every day, and has an experience that is as close to a general school as possible. He even gets to have vocational and leisure instruction in the community.

Superintendent *Sam Breyer*

Board of Directors *Jessica Arzate* ♦ *Mary Botkin* ♦ *Kristin Cornuelle* ♦ *Siobhan Burke* ♦ *Susie Jones* ♦ *Denyse Peterson* ♦ *Helen Ying*



I am afraid that without this tool in our toolbox for moments of crisis, for both his safety and that of others, Joe may need to receive home instruction instead. I personally don't feel that's fair to Joe or other students like him, but if I cannot ensure the safety of my students and staff, I cannot serve them at Wheatley. Given the level of need of our students, we are the last school setting option for the students who come through our doors.

I want to reiterate that I do not believe supine restraints should be used in a general education setting, and they are in fact our last resort intervention. My concern really applies to only a small percentage of a portion of our students.

Regardless of outcome, we will continue to provide optimal and excellent care and service to all students, but we wanted to make sure that our message was shared of this potential situation and possible difficulties that may arise if we do not have access to the supine hold in the most challenging situations.

I do appreciate the effort that has gone into this bill and to ensuring that staff who have not been adequately trained in safety holds are not restraining students. I'm grateful for your time and consideration, and I invite any of you to come visit us at Wheatley School to learn more about our students and programs.

Thank you,

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