

Hello, my name is Ella Marie Gass-Gilchrist. I feel that it is of great importance that I share with you my personal experience regarding the abuse of power and a lack of accountability during a time when there was little to no oversight regarding the use of restraint and seclusion. The abuse started when I was in first grade. I was seven years old at the time. I was very energetic, hyper even. I had to be moved to the special education classroom because my energy levels were too much to handle for teachers who taught in regular classrooms.

I would be dragged into isolation for reasons that could have been relatively easy to resolve if my needs were met. I would become overwhelmed at the sight of a workload that felt like it would take an eternity to complete at the time. It was like I was looking over the edge of a cliff. The longer I looked, the bottom seemed to continue its descent into the earth. I would say that I couldn't possibly complete all of this work before recess time, and when my worry became reality, I was denied the temporary escape I desperately sought after and needed. I saw no point in trying to learn what I could force myself to temporarily focus on, because my best simply wasn't enough. As a result, I would simply be refused recess regardless of whether or not I tried to work on schoolwork, because I couldn't get it done on time anyways.

It wasn't a matter of giving up, but a matter of refusing to participate in something that felt like its very design was to further destroy any faith I had left in myself. My anxiety would grow more unbearable as a result of not being able to get out the energy I had, so naturally I screamed and cried as a result. I was never a danger to anyone or myself, yet I was dragged in front of all of my peers and other staff members, into a closet sized, nearly barren room, everyday, for a year and a half. I would be left nearly alone for two to six hours daily, my only social contact being the teacher who dragged me inside. I would be told things like "you can come out when you stop crying." "You can come out when you stop making bad choices." "You need to choose to calm down before you can come back to class." I would scream for my mom, and I would scream the same question every time. "Why does everyone hate me?" The hatred I felt

from my isolation would turn to a hatred I would have for the world and its injustices. When my parents were finally able to figure out that something was wrong, and that I needed a different school, I would still find that my anger never left. I would go from school to school, my rebelliousness at the age of eight could almost be compared to that of a teenager, which of course left me without much of an education. I learned to read when I was ten with the help of a tutor, and my writing was something my mom had to teach me at home.

I still, as a result of my prolonged isolation and neglect, struggle to form any deep and long lasting connections with people. Even after a decade of therapy, I still have severe anxiety regarding any kind of educational institution and authority, which makes going to college very hard, and my ability to work very limited. Overall, my ability to be a productive member of society has been much more limited, far beyond what is simply a result of my disability.

You can imagine the anger that I felt when I saw this bill, and the anger I feel for the students who are less fortunate than I, whether it be from a lack of a loving family to support them, or having a disability that alters the way they can communicate, I cannot let the progress regarding disability rights to fall backwards. When the outcome for this bill is to be decided, I hope my testimony here lingers in the minds of those who make the final decisions for this bill. Two minutes of speaking simply wasn't enough I'm afraid. Have a great and thoughtful weekend to all who have read this far.