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May 28, 2019

Dr. Daniel Curry, Superintendent
Calvert County Board of Education
1305 Dares Beach Rd
Prince Frederick, MD 20678

Sent via email

RE: Use of Seclusion and Restraint in Schools

Dear Superintendent Curry, members of the Calvert County Board of Education, and members of the Seclusion and Restraint Committee:

I write as a parent, educator, and citizen interested in promoting positive education experiences and outcomes for all children. I am a former outpatient teacher with a psychiatric unit at the University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics in Iowa City, Iowa. Early in my career as an outpatient teacher, I taught children who exhibited a wide range of behavior in the public schools for four years. For the past 38 years, I have served as a professor in the College of Education at the University of Maryland, College Park with a specialization in behavior disorders. In addition to training teachers, I have worked with state departments of education, regional offices of education, and school districts in a number of states to develop effective policies and practices to support all children.

My experience as a direct service provider, researcher, and scholar has taught me that isolation or seclusion of children with significant learning and behavioral needs, has no place in the schools. Too often, the use of isolation exacerbates behavioral problems and can result in denial of services to which students are entitled. Many schools and school districts have developed more appropriate and effective responses to student behavior. Some students who experience isolation in school believe they are being punished; others develop negative feelings about schools and their teachers. Aberrant behavior in school can be a manifestation of a student's disabling condition. When schools use isolation, it often signals that a behavior intervention plan (BIP) or the level of services and supports for a particular student are inadequate.

I do believe that restraint can be used appropriately in schools but only in specific instances and by trained staff. Consistent with COMAR, I believe that when students present imminent, serious, physical harm to themselves or others, restraint may be used to separate students or prevent them from harming themselves. Restraints should only be used as long as necessary help students regain control. Schools and school districts should have well-developed protocols for the use of restraint and several trained staff in each school who know how and when to use restraint safely. Schools and school districts should have reporting mechanisms to document the use of restraint and a process to analyze incidents involving the use of restraints.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Peter E. Leone".

Peter E. Leone, Ph.D.
Professor