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Disability Organizations:

MUSIC Reinforces Dangerous Stereotypes, Practices

Coalition to release its own educational movie LISTEN and an informational toolkit to combat unrealistic depictions and potentially harmful scenes in MUSIC

WASHINGTON, D.C. – [CommunicationFIRST](#), the [Autistic Self Advocacy Network](#) (ASAN), and the [Alliance Against Seclusion and Restraint](#) (AASR) today condemned the [Golden Globe-nominated](#) movie MUSIC, directed by singer-songwriter Sia Furler. The film, released widely via video on-demand services today, contains a number of deeply disturbing and potentially harmful scenes. In late January, a team of nonspeaking and autistic people recruited by CommunicationFIRST was invited to preview the film and provide feedback. In relaying that feedback, CommunicationFIRST urged the filmmakers to remove the scenes involving prone restraint, which can kill and is illegal in many states. The MUSIC team never responded to CommunicationFIRST's recommendations, except in several Tweets by Sia—that have since been deleted—promising to cut the restraint scenes.

In addition to normalizing prone restraint, MUSIC offers an outdated and damaging portrayal of nonspeaking and autistic people. For instance, the nonspeaking character is portrayed as being unable to grieve, which re-enforces the dangerous stereotype that autistic and nonspeaking people are incapable of making human connections. MUSIC also perpetuates the false presumption that people who communicate atypically have little to no internal life and that augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) is both limited and can be learned in a matter of seconds.

“As a nonspeaking autistic person who is actively engaged on social media with people around the world, Sia’s comments towards our community have been disturbing,” said Jordyn Zimmerman, CommunicationFIRST Board member. “While society may have inadvertently taught Sia this misconception about our level of competence, she is in a unique position to teach her audience members that nonspeaking autistics are capable of so much more. Unfortunately, MUSIC fails on so many levels. Instead of humanizing autistic and non-speaking

people, the film re-enforces dangerous stereotypes and puts the disability community at unacceptable risk.”

“The end result of MUSIC’s approach to portraying autism underscores how important it is for autistic people to be involved in telling our own stories, every step of the way. The autistic community has been fighting for decades to end the use of restraints that traumatize and kill,” said Zoe Gross, Director of Advocacy at the Autistic Self Advocacy Network. “Had the filmmakers chosen to meaningfully involve autistic people from the beginning, we could have told them how catastrophically irresponsible it is to encourage viewers to use the kind of deadly restraints that killed Max Benson, Eric Parsa, and many other members of our community.”

“As an autistic self-advocate who has PTSD from being subjected to restraint and seclusion, I am extremely disappointed in recent comments from Sia,” said Alexander Campbell, the KASSA Campaign Director at the Alliance Against Seclusion and Restraint. “Restraint is dangerous. It has caused deaths, physical injuries, and lifelong trauma for people who have been subjected to it. Portraying restraint as an acceptable and best practice in the film is troublesome, as it harms our community, especially those who have been subjected to restraint and seclusion. I believe the film industry should be used to show the dangers and problems associated with the practice of restraint. It should not be used to support or promote the practice.”

In response to the outcry about MUSIC, CommunicationFIRST is releasing its own short educational movie, [LISTEN](#), which features actual nonspeaking autistic people living their lives and talking about what is important to them. In addition, the three organizations have made available a [toolkit](#) with resources about nonspeaking autism, how to work with and more realistically portray nonspeaking autistics in film and theater, augmentative and alternative communication, what to do when you see someone having a meltdown, the dangers of restraint, and other topics.

CommunicationFIRST, ASAN, and AASR felt compelled to speak out and release their own educational materials given the widespread harm that will likely be caused by a film made by a global celebrity with a massive following. The problems with the film were further exacerbated when the Hollywood Foreign Press Association nominated MUSIC for two Golden Globe Awards. For weeks, disability organizations have recommended that Sia pull MUSIC, apologize to the autistic community, partner with advocacy groups to promote adequate services for disabled people, and raise awareness about the need to end the institutional bias in disability services. Despite good-faith efforts to educate Sia and the team behind MUSIC, the disability community has yet to receive any direct response to its concerns and recommendations.

For more reactions to MUSIC from autistic and nonspeaking people, visit <https://communicationfirst.org/LISTEN>.

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CommunicationFIRST is the only national, nonprofit organization dedicated to protecting and advancing the civil rights of the more than five million people of all ages in the United States who, due to disability or other condition, are unable to rely on speech alone to communicate. Run by and for people with expressive communication disabilities, CommunicationFIRST advances its mission by educating and engaging the public, advocating for policy and practice reform, and engaging the justice system to ensure access to effective communication, to end prejudice and discrimination, and to promote equity, justice, inclusion, and opportunity for our historically marginalized community. <https://CommunicationFIRST.org>

The **Autistic Self Advocacy Network (ASAN)** is a disability rights organization run by and for autistic people. ASAN believes that the goal of autism advocacy should be a world in which autistic people enjoy equal access, rights, and opportunities. For more information about the organization, please visit: <https://autisticadvocacy.org>

The **Alliance Against Seclusion and Restraint** is a highly diverse grassroots coalition comprised of neurodivergent and neurotypical parents, grandparents, autistic self-advocates, attorneys, educators, and others. The group is dedicated to changing minds, laws, policies, and practices so that restraint and seclusion are reduced and eliminated in all settings. For more information about the organization, please visit: <https://www.endseclusion.org>