



October 23th, 2024

Amy Boles
Superintendent
Ellsworth School Board
11 Avery Lane
Ellsworth, ME 04605

Superintendent Boles and members of the Board of Education,

My name is Guy Stephens. I am the founder and executive director of the [Alliance Against Seclusion and Restraint](#) (AASR). AASR is a national nonprofit organization and a community of over 30,000 parents, caregivers, self-advocates, educators, related professionals, and others working together to influence change in supporting children whose behaviors are often misunderstood. Our mission is to inform changes in policy and practice to reduce and eliminate the use of exclusionary punitive discipline and outdated behavioral management approaches and end the school-to-prison pipeline. Our vision is safer schools for students, teachers, and staff.

We are reaching out to you today because families in your district have contacted us with concerns about the use of restraint and seclusion in the Ellsworth School District. We recently reviewed the [public comment](#) made by Krystal Emerson at the October 8th, 2024, Ellsworth School Board meeting. Ms. Emerson shared her family's experience and her recommendation to reduce and eliminate the use of restraint and seclusion in the Ellsworth School district. Ms. Emerson highlighted the opportunity for the district to collaborate to improve outcomes for students, teachers, and staff. We believe that when school districts collaborate with parents and educators, we can create stronger and safer schools for our communities.



According to [federal guidance](#), restraint and/or seclusion should never be used except in situations where a child's behavior poses an imminent danger of serious physical harm to self or others, and restraint and seclusion should be avoided to the greatest extent possible without endangering the safety of students and staff. The important wording here is "serious physical harm." these measures are not intended merely for unsafe situations but rather for situations that could result in death or serious bodily injury. Hundreds of [children have died](#) nationwide due to the use of physical restraint in schools, residential facilities, and medical settings. The use of physical restraint is the use of potentially deadly force its use should be rare in a K-12 setting. I encourage you to ask yourself if these practices occur more frequently in your district than they should. Are these practices always limited to situations that involve imminent serious physical harm?

We are reaching out to you to offer our help. There are many things we can do [instead](#) of using physical restraint and seclusion. At the Alliance Against Seclusion and Restraint, we promote trauma-informed, neuroscience-aligned, neurodiversity-affirming, relationship-driven, and collaborative approaches to working with children. We have [presented at conferences and events](#) across North America, and I regularly speak as a guest lecturer for undergraduate and graduate courses on the topic of reducing and eliminating the use of restraint and seclusion. We are often cited in [news and media](#) coverage related to restraint, seclusion, suspension, expulsion, corporal punishment, and other forms of punitive and exclusionary discipline. We are nationally recognized experts on the issue of restraint and seclusion. We previously participated in a Department of Justice [roundtable](#) discussion on the use of physical restraint and seclusion and provided oral [testimony to the United States Congress](#) House Education and Labor Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education.

In 2022, the Alliance Against Seclusion and Restraint (AASR) partnered with the [Crisis Prevention Institute](#) (CPI). CPI is the largest crisis management training provider in the nation. They are aligned with our organization in reducing the use of restraint and eliminating the practice of seclusion. Our partnership focused on accelerating



progress on our shared goals. Through this partnership, AASR contributed to the development of a new training program called Reframing Behavior. [Reframing Behavior](#) is a new schoolwide training program that unpacks the latest neuroscience research to help all educators build a more positive, supportive learning environment and prevent disruptive behavior. I would be happy to meet with you and tell you more about this program.

We are reaching out to you to share our concerns and offer support. When we know better, we need to do better, and there are far better ways to support students, teachers, and staff than seclusion and restraint. We encourage you to take these concerns seriously. We encourage you to consider changes in policy and practice that can be provided for teachers and staff in the district to eliminate seclusion and reduce the use of restraint. Thank you for your time and work on this critical issue. We appreciate your support for students, teachers, staff, and families of the Ellsworth School District. Let us know if we can help.

Sincerely,

Guy Stephens
Founder & Executive Director
Alliance Against Seclusion and Restraint