



February 12th, 2025

Loudoun County Board of Education
21000 Education Court
Ashburn, VA 20148

Dear Board of Education Members and Dr. Spence,

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 and a community of over 30,000 parents, caregivers, self-advocates, teachers, school administrators, paraprofessionals, attorneys, psychologists, therapists, social workers, 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is to inform changes in policy and practice to reduce and eliminate the use of exclusionary punitive discipline and outdated behavioral management approaches and end the school-to-prison pipeline.

I am writing to you regarding your consideration of the seclusion and restraint policy in Loudoun County Public Schools. We commend your board for reviewing your current policy on restraint and seclusion. As you consider updates, we strongly urge you to **prohibit the use of seclusion** entirely and significantly limit the use of physical restraint. These practices are disproportionately used on students with disabilities, Black and brown students, and students with a trauma history and can have severe long-term negative impacts on students' physical and mental well-being.

The issue of the use of seclusion in Loudoun County Public Schools is not new. In 2018, a [photograph](#) of Gigi Daniel-Zagorites in a makeshift seclusion area within a special needs classroom at Belmont Ridge Middle School in Lansdowne raised concerns. Parents shared concerns about the practice, and in 2019, Governor



Ralph Northam signed into law [a bill](#) that was being named after Loudoun County student Gigi Daniel-Zagorites, who was a nonspeaking child with a disability. Sadly, the practice continues in Loudoun County. We have heard concerns from numerous families with children in Loudoun County Public Schools. We can and must do better for our students, teachers, and families.

We recommend following the example set by neighboring Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS), which prohibited seclusion in 2021 following a lawsuit over the district's use of seclusion and restraint. If Fairfax County Public Schools can do it, so can Loudoun County Public Schools. Don't wait for a lawsuit, a serious injury, or a [Department of Justice investigation](#). Be proactive. Several states now prohibit the use of seclusion in all public schools, and more are working on statewide bills that would prohibit the practice of seclusion. It is possible, and it is the right thing to do.

Schools should be doing all they can to reduce the use of restraint and eliminate the use of seclusion. That is not just our opinion but [one shared](#) by the largest crisis management training provider in the country, the Crisis Prevention Institute. How do we reduce and eliminate these practices? We encourage you to implement trauma-informed, neuroscience-aligned, neurodiversity-affirming, relationship-driven, and collaborative approaches to supporting students. By adopting these approaches, you can create a safer and more supportive environment for all students and staff while reducing the need for restrictive and potentially harmful interventions.

In 2022, the Alliance Against Seclusion and Restraint (AASR) partnered with the Crisis Prevention Institute (CPI). 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

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learning environment and prevent disruptive behavior. It is possible we can reduce and eliminate these practices when we come together.

We would be happy to provide further information or assistance as you review and update your policies. We have worked with schools and other facilities that have successfully eliminated seclusion, reduced the use of restraint, and improved outcomes for students, teachers, staff, and families.

Thank you for your consideration of this critical issue and your commitment to the well-being of all students in Loudoun County Public Schools.

Sincerely,

Guy Stephens
Executive Director
Alliance Against Seclusion and Restraint