



Putting an End to the Use of School Seclusion Rooms

JEFFERSON CITY — Recent disturbing reports across the country — and in our own state — of alleged incidents of improper restraint and seclusion being used as school disciplinary measures for students receiving special education services prompted me to file [Senate Bill 445](#), which would ban seclusion rooms and begin our state's efforts to begin addressing this troubling national issue.

The use of seclusion rooms, usually small rooms with padding on the walls, first came to my attention when I chaired the Blue Ribbon Panel on Autism. [Senate Bill 445](#) would prevent special education students from being confined in locked areas or rooms as a behavior management technique or discipline management practice. There would be exemptions in certain situations when confinement is necessary to prevent bodily harm to the student or another person. The bill does not exclude the use of appropriate limited time-outs in order for students to regain self-control.

Under the bill's proposals, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education would be responsible for creating procedures for the proper use of restraint and time-out by school district employees, school district volunteers, and independent contractors of school districts for students with a disability that receive special education services. In addition, staff and volunteers would receive proper training in appropriate disciplinary management and behavior management techniques.

The reported cases of injury, trauma, and in some cases, death to children with disabilities outlined in the report and in newspaper headlines across the country are just heartbreaking. Already, Texas has halted its use of seclusion rooms and restraint of students, and Georgia is drafting legislation to address the issue following a young teen's suicide within a seclusion room. According to a 2007 study conducted by a Clemson University researcher, 24 states do have written guidelines on the use of seclusion rooms, which reportedly are intended as a last resort when other attempts have failed to calm a child or stop a child from hurting himself or others. Shockingly, the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education has none.

Schools should be safe havens, free of violence, and students should never be victimized by professionals entrusted to take care of them. This measure would work to regulate the use of behavior control methods, ensure those who work with these special students are properly trained to care for them, and would ensure student safety.

If you have comments or questions about this week's column or any other matter involving state government, please do not hesitate to contact me. You can reach my office by phone at (866) 271-2844.

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