



December 17, 2009

The Honorable George Miller
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Cathy McMorris-Rodgers
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representatives:

On behalf of Autism Speaks, the nation's largest autism science and advocacy organization, I am writing to thank you for introducing H.R. 4247, the Preventing Harmful Restraint and Seclusion in Schools Act. Seclusion, restraint and other aversive interventions in schools cause unnecessary trauma, injury and death to America's children, and we support your efforts in addressing this important issue.

Key provisions of H.R. 4247 would establish minimum safety standards in schools, limit physical restraint and locked seclusion to instances when there is imminent danger of injury, outlaw the use of mechanical restraints, and encourage states to provide relevant training to staff. In addition, the bill would prohibit aversive interventions that compromise health and safety, such as denying students water, food, or clothing and denying access to toilet facilities.

Research, recent reports, and the Government Accountability Office (GAO) investigation requested by Chairman Miller show a disproportionate use of restraint and seclusion techniques on students with disabilities, including autism. Children with autism, many of whom are non-verbal or have other communications challenges, are especially vulnerable to dangerous interventions at school by staff who can at times be ill-prepared to deal with their unique behavioral issues. This legislation is an important step toward ending inhumane treatment of children with autism and other disabilities, who – like all students – should be able to trust their educators and feel completely safe in their school environment.

Thank you again for introducing this legislation to prevent this harmful practice. Autism Speaks stands ready to assist in enacting legislation that fully protects each student's right to be safe at school.

Sincerely,

Peter Bell
Executive Vice President, Programs & Services
Autism Speaks