

Senator,

As a former educational director and school principal of a prominent Salt Lake City area organization for "at risk" boys, I have witnessed first hand the cruelty of restraint therapy.

When I joined this organization I had no background in, experience with, or exposure to restraint therapy. Consequently, I had no preconceived opinions prior to seeing the technique used. Since the company I worked for endorsed and practiced restraint therapy, I assumed that it was a legitimate and valuable treatment. After seeing several sessions of this therapy I became deeply concerned about the welfare of the boys in my classes as well as the future of the school. Several attempts were made to express my concerns to the Executive Director of this organization and when my concerns went unheard I felt morally responsible to give this information to the Board of Directors. The week after my meeting with a member of the Board I was terminated from my position due to "insubordination".

Initially, I became aware the practice was being used when a boy was removed from class, without warning or notification, and taken to a private area for restraint therapy. I was concerned about the impact that missing two to four hours of school time was having on a boy's education, however it soon became apparent that there was more at stake than their education. These sessions were conducted behind closed doors, and sometimes performed by non-employed, inexperienced or unlicensed individuals.

It wasn't until I witnessed more than one procedure that I became horrified by it. I am a firm believer of "tough love", but what was considered to be therapy was very obviously abusive, cruel, and dangerous. Usually, in the moments prior to a session of restraint therapy these young boys presented no immediate danger to themselves or anyone else.

A session would begin with a boy lying on the floor, tightly wrapped in blanket in a restrictive position, much like a straight jacket, unable to move his arms and hands. Then one, two, or three men, with a combined weight of up to four times more than the boy, would be on top of him throughout the session. In an attempt to get the boy to say and behave in the way the "therapist" felt appropriate, I watched painful techniques administered. For example, one person would lean on him with an elbow in his abdomen, while another sat on his chest, making it difficult for him to breathe. This kind of pressure would be continued for up to three or four minutes at a time and the session would last up to three hours. Because of this treatment, I saw boys urinate, defecate, or vomit. When a boy would urinate or defecate in the blanket, the session continued without cleaning him up. Boys would continuously scream such things as "I can't breathe", "you're hurting me", "get off me", "leave me alone", but their requests were always ignored. This treatment would continue until a boy finally broke down.

The most troubling session I witnessed was administered to a boy that was scheduled for hernia surgery. The doctor had given explicit instructions, formally in writing to the organization, that this boy was not to lift anything heavy or engage in any strenuous activity that could cause the hernia to rupture. These instructions were ignored and

while the boy awaited surgery, without regard to the doctor's instructions, restraint therapy was administered.

I remember thinking that if I felt my life was being threatened, as these boys must certainly have felt, I would have said or done anything necessary to stop the abuse. I believe that many times the success of a session was nothing more than a boy's desire to survive.

I was dismissed from my position and sacrificed my career because I took a stand against some of the practices being used on clients, foremost among them being restraint therapy. The Senate has the power and opportunity to banish this barbaric practice. Let Utah send a message to the rest of the nation that this practice has no place in our society.

Please vote in favor of HB5 to prohibit restraint therapy.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

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