

Milena Bates,
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Testimony regarding the School Resource Officer Bill,

Dear Chair Moller and Committee members, I write this testimony from the perspective of a parent of children receiving special education services, educator, community organizer, as well as a member of the disabled and immigrant communities.

I appreciate some of the language in the bill, especially as it relates to requiring training on de-escalation, mental health, trauma and child development. The exceptions for untrained officers being hired are concerning, such as those for long term substitutes and six months for new hires. I have been in a school staff position where I had such a period of time to complete necessary training, and after finally going through it, I was resentful of some of the difficulties that both the students and I would have been spared if I had been able to get the training right away.

The generous allowances of discretion regarding use of force are disturbing to me as a parent. The language allowing for prone restraint is downright alarming. As someone who has managed crisis situations personally and professionally, there is no need to use a restraint procedure with such a high risk as prone restraint. Restraint procedures in general carry a high risk of trauma and most are still at the disposal of peace officers. Excluding the one that carries the most risk of death and is outlawed for use on adults, is less than the minimum consideration of minors that we are trying to keep safe. These procedures must also include consideration of equity, because students at the intersection of multiple minority identities are at compounded risk of being subjected to them.

I sincerely hope you will reflect on the many joined voices of the local organizations that are representing the interests of children as well as the students themselves, sounding the alarm on the risks of allowing prone restraint in any form. There is a lot of specialized professional knowledge informing these statements that should be weighed heavily, lest we achieve the opposite of our stated goal.

Thank you for your attention,

Milena Bates