

Written Testimony of Martha Moked

February 10, 2021

HB0715

Support - Self-Contained Special Education Classrooms - Use of Video Recording Devices

My name is Martha Moked, and I'd like to begin by thanking the Ways and Means Committee for hearing my testimony today. I'm testifying in support of House Bill 0715, which would require each board of education in Maryland to install video recording devices in special education classrooms. I feel that it is critical to implement this law in order to protect special education students and give their parents a way to receive answers when they believe an adverse incident has affected their child at school.

While my children were in elementary school, I substituted in special education classrooms at their school for two years. I worked with some amazing teachers and instructional assistants, who cared for the students with compassion and respect, but I also worked with some teachers and instructional assistants who did not. I witnessed one special education teacher in particular, along with an assistant in his classroom, who mistreated students in his class year after year, even after being told that his behavior had been reported. There was no punishment for his treatment of these students, which included slapping and pulling them, yelling in their faces, using racial slurs, mocking them, withdrawing food, and threatening them with things that he knew terrified them. Most of his students were nonverbal or students who, if verbal, would not have been able to tell their parents about the way they had been treated, due to the limitation of their verbal skills because of their autism. Remember, this was in an elementary school and the children in this class were 7 and 8 year olds, whose parents entrusted the school and this man with their special needs children. They believed their children were being treated with kindness and compassion. I can't imagine being one of these children, being treated this way, and being unable to tell anyone. These children understand what is happening to them but can't verbalize it.

A small group of us, including several instructional assistants and parents, reported his behavior to Child Protective Services, the Sheriff's Department, Frederick County Public Schools, the board of education, and Maryland Department of Education, but no one held this teacher accountable for his mistreatment of his students. After an investigation and taking the testimony of 7 witnesses confirming this behavior, the superintendent made the final decision to leave him in the classroom. If there had been video footage, it could not have been denied.

I was glad to see that this law includes the placement of video recording devices in resource teachers' classrooms, as well. This is a classroom where, in some cases, the special education resource teacher is alone with individual special education students. These students have been mainstreamed but go to receive special services. I believe that if this bill is passed, it will give parents, school staff, and boards of education a tool to use, should they feel that something of concern has occurred.

Thank you for your time.