



In Support of SB 577: Public Schools – Self-Contained Special Education Classrooms – Use of Video Recording Devices.

Members of the Maryland Senate, Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs committee.

I am the parent of a young man, Jake, who has been in a Baltimore County school self-contained classroom since Pre-K 3. Jake, 18, is physically and cognitively impaired, including being non-verbal. He is not able to tell me what happens to him good or bad. Individuals with an intellectual disability are eager to please the people around them and are easily convinced to say or not say things by those working with them. Because of this, these individuals are often targeted. In the legal system their testimony is not sought out or is disregarded as unreliable due to their disability.

My son was molested by an individual who was his in-home caregiver. The only way I found out was after a severe behavior change and the caregiver being arrested on unrelated child porn charges, did I find out what happened to my son. The police and prosecutors would not interview my son as he was deemed an unreliable witness, so the abuser was never charged. I was told if I had video evidence of the abuse that would have been enough to charge him. The abuser had a clean background and all that means for people like him is that they have never been caught. My son's abuser was caught with 100's of child porn photos going back years.

A parent's biggest fear is the abuse of their child, and we do everything in our power to prevent it. Parents must trust that the school staff we are handing our child off to are going to care for and protect them. Despite knowing that oftentimes there are substitute teachers, aides, and other staff working with them. A camera in the classroom can protect the most vulnerable of our children like my son.

A camera in the classroom can also protect staff from false allegations. My son has issues with balance and falls, sometimes daily, often leading to bruises or scrapes. It would be very easy for a child like mine to come home with these 'unexplained' injuries and blame the staff. It is also easy for students in these classrooms to have behaviors that injure another student when nobody is looking. If there was a camera in the classroom the incident could be reviewed and an innocent staff member would not have to miss time from work, get a lawyer, or have their career ended by a false allegation.

We have cameras on buses, on Police, in stores, and in many other public places to protect people from crimes, why would a self-contained classroom, which houses the most vulnerable of our students be any different? Please vote **FOR** SB 577 and allow students like Jake, and the staff that help him to be protected from harm.

Respectfully Submitted
Angela Sittler,
Parent of Jake Sittler