Statement of the Autism Society Regarding House Hearing on Restraints and Seclusion in Schools

February 27, 2019, Bethesda, MD -- The Autism Society of America is extremely pleased to see that the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Education and Labor is bringing attention to the issue of improper use of restraints and seclusion in schools through a hearing today.

When we send our children to school, we assume that they are going to be treated fairly and that they are going to be safe from abuse and neglect. However, that is not always the case. Far too often, we hear stories from parents whose children with autism or other disabilities have been subjected to dangerous and improper use of restraints and unnecessary and abusive seclusion. In fact, data from the U.S. Department of Education civil rights data collection shows that most students restrained and secluded are students with disabilities. Students with disabilities make up 12 percent of all students but represent 71 percent of those restrained and 66 percent of those secluded.

This problem has been going on for far too long. In 2009, the U.S. GAO did a study of the issue and found no federal laws restricting the use of seclusion and restraints and it documented hundreds of cases of alleged abuse and death related to these dangerous methods. Examples of these cases include a seven-year-old dying after being held face down for hours by school staff; five-year-olds being tied to chairs with bungee cords and duct tape; and a 13-year-old hanging himself in a seclusion room. In spite of this evidence, legislation aimed at reducing the use of restraints and seclusion in schools has languished in Congress for years without action.

“'I am very pleased the U.S. Congress is finally addressing this issue,” said Jonathan Kratchman, New Jersey self-advocate and Autism Society Public Policy Committee member. “I have experienced restraints first-hand and am still haunted by those experiences. I hope this never happens to another student,” he said.

The Autism Society of America has been advocating for federal legislation, such as the Keeping All Students Safe Act, to address this issue for many years. We strongly urge lawmakers to pass federal legislation to prevent unnecessary harm to students.

The Autism Society of America is the nation’s oldest and largest grassroots organization representing children and adults with autism. For more information, contact Kim Musheno at 301-657-0881, ext. 9020.

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