



Testimony of Naomi Nova
Vice President
Special Education Equity for Kids in Connecticut (SEEK)
To Committee on Education
February 20, 2026

Senator McCrory, Chairwoman Leeper, Senator Berthel, Representative Zupkus, and members of the Education Committee:

It is a pleasure to appear before you today and offer testimony on behalf of Special Education Equity for Kids of Connecticut, commonly known as SEEK. Four of us are appearing today on behalf of SEEK, each to cover a different aspect of the pending legislation. John Flanders, the President of SEEK, will testify on the need to create a state office to backfill for the hollowed-up federal Office for Civil Rights and will also discuss the need for the Department of Education to publish full complaint decisions with only the identity of the student redacted. Andy Feinstein, SEEK's treasurer and Advocacy Committee Chair, will testify on funding issues and where the money allocated to special education is best applied. Stacey Tie, SEEK's secretary, will testify concerning needed changes in Public Act 25-67, specifically related to rate setting, the identity of implementers in the IEP document, and removing the restriction on SEED money going to contract employees.

My testimony will focus on the need for cameras in self-contained classrooms, the need to clarify the definitions of restraint and seclusion, the need to ban the use of seclusion in schools, and the need to guarantee parents the right to have their experts observe in school.

CAMERAS IN CLASSROOMS

SEEK is requesting that you enact legislation that incentivizes the installation of cameras in self-contained classrooms and all rooms that are used for seclusion.

Some of our most vulnerable students are educated in self-contained classrooms, including those with significant communication impairments and challenging behaviors. While most of these classrooms have a very high teacher to student ratio, it is extremely uncommon for students in these classrooms to have a dedicated paraprofessional providing 1:1 support throughout their school day, as 1:1 support typically does not fit into the "model" of these Classrooms.

Even when the teachers and classroom support staff are doing everything right, there are instances that arise where a student may sustain an unwitnessed injury. It can happen during more chaotic times (such as during transition or when another student in the room is experiencing a crisis) and it can be subtle. For example, some students have extremely high pain thresholds and may not react to banging their head or a body part against a piece of furniture if they are in a dysregulated state. I've seen a preschooler fall down a small flight of stairs and pick himself up like nothing happened.

When the signs of the unwitnessed injury manifest – whether it be a bruise or a bite mark or a delayed complaint of pain – everybody loses. If the student is unable to communicate (or reliably communicate) what happened, neither the teachers nor the parents can identify whether and what additional safety measures may be needed to prevent further injuries. Parents become mistrustful that their child is safe in that classroom. Teachers may be subject to attack and allegations of neglect or misconduct. The student's safety and dignity are harmed and Compromised.

Installing cameras in self-contained classrooms and seclusion rooms will provide invaluable protection to our most vulnerable students. They will provide an impartial and objective “voice” that will allow educators to review incidents and provide precise data that can help further the educators' understanding of a student's behavioral triggers. The transparency that cameras offer will provide parents with much-needed peace of mind. In some cases, they may also uncover instances of abuse.

To be clear, while we would enthusiastically support legislation mandating that cameras be installed in all self-contained classrooms and all rooms used for seclusion, we understand the budgetary realities of our times. Therefore, we are asking for cameras in classrooms to be incentivized through Bonding – such as public safety dollars or school construction funds. If you were so inclined to take this up, SEEK would be happy to appear before the Bond Commission.

RESTRAINT AND SECLUSION

With respect to Restraint, SEEK continues to advocate that parents receive same-day notification when their child is restrained at school. Restraint is considered an emergency intervention. In any other emergency situation involving a student, parents expect to receive same-day (or immediate) notification. Notifying the parent will enable the parent to debrief with their child in a timely manner, inform their parenting approach if their child is struggling when they come home from school, and allow the parent make an informed decision as to whether to send their child back to school the next day.



We are also requesting that the definition of “life-threatening restraint” be expanded. Currently, CT Law defines a life-threatening restraint as: “ any physical restraint or hold of a person that (A) restricts the flow of air into a person’s lungs, whether by chest compression or any other means, or (B) immobilizes or reduces the free movement of a person’s arms, legs or head while the person is in the prone position.” CGA §10-236b(a)(1). This definition ignores that there are some students with medical conditions where a supine restraint could also be life-threatening. One example would be students with Down syndrome. Restraining a person with Down syndrome in either the supine or prone position carries a heightened risk of devastating neurologic injury or death. This is because a high prevalence of persons with Down syndrome are born with a loosening of their neck ligaments – a condition called atlantoaxial instability. For these individuals, there is a heightened risk that a restraint in either the supine or prone position could lead to compression of the brainstem and spinal cord, and/or injuries to the major arteries in the neck. What is most terrifying, is that doctors have advised me that by the time the symptoms of such compression or injury manifest, the damage is often irreversible.

Therefore, we are asking that the definition of “life-threatening restraint” be expanded to include any restraint, regardless of whether it is in the prone or supine position, which is deemed life-threatening by the student’s physician.

We are asking that the definition of seclusion be updated to reflect that there are no therapeutic or de-escalating interventions being deployed, and that such practice is banned. SEEK supports offering a student who is in an emotional crisis a separate space where they can regulate with appropriate supports and interventions. (For example, a space where a student has access to manipulatives, or there is a trained professional employing therapeutic or evidence-based de-escalation and soothing techniques, etc., would not constitute “seclusion” as the student is being taught/supported in how to calm down.)

SEEK is strongly opposed to seclusion spaces where the student essentially screams themselves into exhaustion, as this serves no educational purpose, often further escalates a student, and can be extremely traumatizing. By clarifying the definition of seclusion in this way, we can eliminate one of the most dangerous and harmful practices in our schools.

OBSERVATIONS

Currently, there is no guaranteed right to a classroom observation for parents. Yet, observations are an essential component of many educational evaluations. The observation allows the evaluator to assess whether a student is actively engaging with and responding to various interventions, and how the student is functioning in their learning environment. The Connecticut Bureau of Special Education has issued guidance encouraging districts to adopt policies and procedures to allow parents to observe their children in school and at proposed placement options, as such observations may be necessary for parents to meaningfully participate in PPT meetings. The IDEA recognizes that parents have an important role to play in



the identification, evaluation, and educational placement of their children, and in the development, review, and revisions of the IEPs for their children.

As the guidance from our Bureaus of Special Education is nonbinding on school districts, there are some districts in our state that never allow observations, unless the observation is in the context of a publicly funded independent educational evaluation (in which case the school district cannot refuse the observation). This results in significant inequity across the State, as parents in school districts that allow observations are better able to advocate for their children and participate in the decision-making process than those families that reside in districts that are hostile to such observations.

Thank you for your time and for the opportunity to present the views of Special Education Equity for Kids in Connecticut (SEEK).

