



February 9th, 2026

Honorable Chairman Noble
NH House Education Policy and Administration Committee
Subject: Testimony in Opposition of 1688

My name is Louis Esposito, and I serve as the Executive Director of ABLE NH, New Hampshire's statewide grassroots organization working to advance inclusion, access, and full participation for people with disabilities. I also come today as a former supportive education teacher and paraprofessional, and as a doctoral-level researcher in Educational Leadership focused identity, belonging, and long-term outcomes for students with disabilities.

I am submitting this written testimony in opposition to HB 1688. I am opposed to this bill because I have firsthand experience with physical restraint in educational settings, and I know the toll it takes on students, educators, and school communities. I have restrained a student before. It is not something I say casually, and it is not something that ever leaves you.

I worked with a student who engaged in repeated self-injurious behavior, striking her head on the ground over and over until the risk of serious harm became immediate. I can still hear the sound of her head hitting the floor. When she would not stop, restraint was used as a last resort to prevent injury. That moment was traumatic. It affected the student. It affected me. It affected the paraprofessionals who assisted. It affected the other students who witnessed it. Physical restraint is not a neutral intervention. Even when done with care and training, it leaves emotional and psychological harm in its wake.

What is important for this committee to understand is that restraint did not solve the problem. It did not address the underlying need. It did not teach coping skills. It did not build trust. In fact, it strained the relationship I had worked hard to build with that student. She was afraid afterward. I was emotionally shaken. The classroom environment changed. The restraint stopped the immediate crisis, but it did nothing to prevent the next one.

What ultimately helped that student were the supports that followed. Speech therapy. Occupational therapy. Physical therapy. Behavioral supports. Consistent, relationship-based interventions that addressed communication, sensory needs, and regulation. Those

supports reduced the behavior. Restraint did not. This experience is not unique. It reflects what many educators already know: restraint is a signal that a system has failed to meet a student's needs, not a solution to behavior.

HB 1688 lowers the standard for when restraint can be used by allowing it in response to any "imminent risk of bodily harm," rather than limiting it to serious and substantial risk. This change may appear technical, but in practice it dramatically expands when restraint can be justified. That expansion matters because restraint is inherently risky and traumatic, even when performed by trained professionals. Lowering the threshold makes it more likely that restraint will be used unnecessarily, eroding trust and harming student relationships.

Student relationships are the foundation of learning and safety. When restraint is used unnecessarily, it tells students that adults are a source of control rather than support. It can be triggering, especially for students with trauma histories or disabilities. It impacts not only the restrained student, but peers and staff who witness it. Making restraint easier to use increases the likelihood of long-term harm for everyone involved.

Restraint should always be a true last resort, used only in emergency situations, by highly trained professionals, when all other interventions have failed. HB 1688 moves New Hampshire in the opposite direction. Instead of expanding harmful practices, the state should be strengthening access to preventive, evidence-based supports that reduce the need for restraint altogether.

For these reasons, and based on my professional experience, I respectfully urge the committee to oppose HB 1688.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

Respectfully submitted,

Louis Esposito