

February 8, 2021

Chairman Todd D. Weiler
350 State St.
Salt Lake City, Utah 84103

Dear Chairman Weiler,

My name is Jen Robison, and I am submitting this letter to you today in support of SB0217. As a former child who was held in Utah 2003-2005 in a well known residential treatment program, and repeatedly abused within that program, it has been a call on my heart as an adult to prevent such harm from befalling yet another generation of vulnerable youth. It is encouraging to see Utah taking steps toward addressing this in a meaningful way.

While I was held at Provo Canyon school, as a 14-16 year old girl suffering from post traumatic stress disorder from earlier childhood events, I would experience and witness a range of cruelty against kids which opened my eyes to parts of human nature and systemic corruption which I believe only fellow survivors of this industry may truly understand. I was dragged by my feet off a top bunk and into isolation for lying still in bed when commanded to move, I would be left in that same cement cell over and over again as means of punishment and to break my will. I was kept indoors in a small wing for months, and denied even the right to speak. When these tactics succeeded, and I did indeed break, I would be injected forcibly with haloperidol, sometimes twice a day, and left crying or unconscious on that cement floor. I watched other girls tackled and restrained for shouting or for crying uncontrollably. I witnessed others punished in isolation and forced into silence or orders of humiliation to coerce them to submit. Many of the staff who participated in these events were barely adults themselves, and in my opinion were vastly ill-equipped, undertrained, and under-supported. Those young people were led and pressured by the fewer senior staff who had become hardened to the methods, or worse, stimulated by their own power. The culture of abuse which was born from this was not unique to Provo Canyon School. In listening to survivors and former staff from many different facilities, I have seen clearly that this culture has pervaded the entire industry for decades.

My parents were deceived about my treatment. And I sadly believed in my core, back then, that I had been abandoned by anyone who would have cared to protect me. I consider myself incredibly lucky to have grown up able to process these events and overcome what was done to me in Utah, as well as all that came before, to have a joyful life. The strength that I found in healing, and from confronting the depth of the systemic issues within what we call the "troubled teen" industry, led me to become a co-founder of Breaking Code Silence. This group, and the movement we sparked, has only just begun to

truly bring forward the thousands of individuals who were childhood victims of institutional abuse. It is the beginning of a long road for many states, including Utah, to hear these uncomfortable truths and step up to ensure that all its children are protected. It is hard to imagine the hopelessness and fearfulness in a child without rights, without recourse, and without voice at the mercy of this industry. At the mercy of programs which in pursuit of profit, or emboldened by a false sense of godliness, often hurt the very children they claim to care for. I must tell you that it is not uncommon for these kids to leave such a place deeply damaged and reeling from the trauma. Some are able to get by, to cope by basic means. Too many others have died by suicide or overdose trying desperately to escape that pain. The community connected through Breaking Code Silence knows this well, as we mourn new people every year. I hope this is the time when all of these many thousands of people-- those passed, those living, and those who are still children held within the system, may finally have a voice. I ask you today to please show your support of us by supporting SB0127.

With gratitude,
Jen Robison
Executive Director, Co-Founder
www.breakingcodesilence.net

February 8, 2021

Chairman Todd D. Weiler
350 State St.
Salt Lake City, Utah 84103

Dear Chairman Weiler,

Hello, my name is Guy Stephens. I am the founder and executive director of the [Alliance Against Seclusion and Restraint](#) (AASR). AASR is a community of over 10,000 parents, self-advocates, teachers, school administrators, attorneys, related professionals, and others who are working together to influence change in the way we support children with behavioral challenges. The mission of AASR is to educate the public and to connect people who are dedicated to changing minds, laws, policies, and practices so that restraint, seclusion, and other abusive practices are eliminated from schools, residential facilities, inpatient treatment programs, and behavioral programs across the nation. We proudly stand with Breaking Code Silence in recognizing the need for reform and oversight in the “troubled teen” industry. I am writing to you today to express our support for SBo127.

Unfortunately, many children and young adults are traumatized, injured, and even killed in schools and facilities that are designed to help them including schools, residential treatment facilities, and behavioral programs. This is not a new problem, in fact, in 2009 the Government Accountability Office (GAO) issued a report titled “[Selected Cases of Death and Abuse at Public and Private Schools and Treatment Centers](#)”. The report concluded that there are no federal laws restricting the use of seclusion and restraints in public and private schools and widely divergent laws at the state level. GAO found hundreds of cases of alleged abuse and death related to the use of these methods on children during the prior two decades. Today over a decade later children continue to be traumatized, injured, and even killed.

On April 29, 2020, [Cornelius Frederick](#), a student at Lakeside Academy, a residential facility in Kalamazoo, Michigan threw a sandwich at another boy in the cafeteria. A staff member responded by tackling Cornelius to the ground, and then holding him down, for 12 minutes, as Cornelius struggled and gradually grew still. Seven men who worked for Lakeside held him down in a face-down restraint. Cornelius died at the hospital two days later. The medical examiner ruled it a homicide, the result of Cornelius being asphyxiated.

Restraint, seclusion, and other abusive practices are dangerous and can lead to significant trauma and injuries to students, and staff. Trauma is relevant for several reasons. Many children who are being restrained and/or secluded already have a trauma history and the use of restraint and seclusion is itself traumatic. Trauma can change the brain. Brain areas implicated in the stress response include the amygdala, hippocampus, and prefrontal cortex.

Traumatic stress can be associated with lasting changes in these brain areas and lead to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

There are far better ways to work with children that avoid the need for crisis management. Our schools and treatment programs should be moving towards neurodevelopmentally informed, trauma-sensitive, biologically respectful, relationship-based ways of understanding, and supporting all children. Unfortunately, the industry, left to their own devices has in many cases continued to mistreat children within their care. Without data and oversight, children continue to pay the price.

At AASR we support legislation that will include:

- Restrictions on the use of restraint and seclusion, we believe that seclusion should be banned completely and restraint should only be used in situations that involve a high risk of serious physical harm.
- Training requirements need to include trauma-informed approaches with an emphasis on de-escalation and a requirement for certification in approved training.
- 24-hour reporting of any restraint, seclusion, or critical incidents.
- Quarterly, unannounced inspections instead of 1 yearly announced inspection.

We can make schools, residential facilities, and behavioral programs safer for children and staff while reducing and eliminating the use of restraint and seclusion, but we need your help. Please support SBo127 and let us know if we can assist in any way possible.

Respectfully,



Guy Stephens
Founder and Executive Director
Alliance Against Seclusion and Restraint

February 6, 2021

**Chairman Todd D. Weiler
350 State St.
Salt Lake City, UT 84103**

Dear Chairman Weiler,

My name is Chelsea Maldonado and I am writing to express my support of SB0127. I am a survivor of the 'troubled teen industry' and I request your attention to this matter impacting youth in your State and around the US.

When I was seventeen, I was taken abroad to a behavior modification program in rural Jamaica. While this program was located far from Utah, the founders and the methods they used were both Utah-born. Tranquility Bay, the facility I attended, utilized the same curriculum as Cross Creek Manor, a notoriously abusive (and now defunct) Utah-based program. In fact, Tranquility Bay's owners were the founders of the World Wide Association of Specialty Programs and Schools, previously one of Utah's most well-known and profitable 'troubled teen industry' providers, before it folded under negative press and lawsuits.

While in Tranquility Bay, I experienced and witnessed physical and emotional abuse and neglect. I was denied proper healthcare, psychological treatment, nutrition, hygiene, and basic human rights. My time in a 'troubled teen' program has left me with diagnosed PTSD and other issues that continue to negatively impact my life even now, twenty years after leaving. No child deserves a lifetime of trauma caused by something claiming to 'help' or 'treat' them.

SB027 is important to me because this legislation takes the first small step towards reducing the harm these types of programs cause youth. Adolescence is not criminal, nor is it a mental illness. Being a teenager does not require treatment. Deviating from family values is not illegal, and in some cases should even be encouraged.

The current laws regulating 'troubled teen' facilities in Utah are not sufficient. One facility check per year - most likely announced - is not enough to adequately vet the safety of a program. Allowing workers to interact with youth without background checks is incredibly dangerous, and has been a contributing factor in Utah's above-average sexual abuse rates within its facilities. Most importantly, lax regulation on the use of restraint and seclusion in Utah continues to lead to trauma, injury, and even death. Even the loss of one child's life is too many. Unfortunately, restraint and seclusion take between 50-150 lives every year, according to government reports.

The majority of the youth held in Utah's 'troubled teen' facilities come from out-of-state. These are vulnerable youth, far from their support networks and peers. Utah's current laws do not require facilities to give these children meaningful access to communication with their families. Combined with the issues previously discussed, Utah has created the perfect climate for predators to abuse children. Based on the thousands of reports submitted to our organization

and others by survivors of this industry, abuse and neglect do appear to be rampant across Utah's facilities. It is *imperative* that we address this issue immediately. Trauma can lead to life-long issues that impact not only the individual but also society as a whole. Utah's current system of regulations is not enough and is producing generation after generation of traumatized youth. This must end today.

By passing SB0127, Utah has the opportunity to take the first step to restore its reputation as a State that cares about youth and families. For too long, Utah has profited off of an industry that separates children from their families, strips youth of their human rights, and leads to preventable pain and suffering. By enacting regulations that protect children and center their needs before those of program operators, Utah can begin fixing its troubled systems.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Chelsea Maldonado

Chelsea Maldonado
577 Stokeswood Ave SE
Atlanta, GA 30316
cakapela@gmail.com
(404)844-9953

February 8th, 2021

Chairman Todd D. Weiler
350 State Street,
Salt Lake City, Utah 84103

Dear Chairman Weiler,

My name is Rebecca Moorman, and I'm writing to you today to express my support for SB0127. I am a co-founder of Breaking Code Silence, and a survivor of institutional abuse in the state of Montana; a state that like Utah, has a loosely regulated "troubled teen" industry.

When I was 17 years old, I was kidnapped from my bed in Seattle, Washington-a state that has far more youth rights, and brought first to a wilderness program in Idaho, and then a residential placement in Montana. During my time in Idaho, I had a UTI that went untreated until I had to beg staff to get me appropriate medical care. Once in Montana at the Monarch School, I was forced to cuddle in cuddle puddles with my peers, and with older male staff. At this time, these facilities were completely unregulated, so there was no educational requisite for staff, nor were background checks required.

My story sounds unbelievable, and unfortunately it is not unique.

Within the troubled teen industry, children are cut off from their families, friends and communities. Even when witnessing unspeakable acts committed against children, I was unable to call for help or report it, because I was denied access to any form of communication with the outside world. Any attempt at trying to get help could result in further punishment and abuse. Further, I was often isolated from my peers, and literally put on silence so I could not speak.

Without adequate laws to govern this industry, and when left to govern their own, this industry will continue to mistreat children within their care. Bad actors will continue to hide in plain sight, and children will be left unable to call for help.

Breaking Code Silence is a movement where we allow survivors to take back their voices by telling their stories with the hope of preventing this type of trauma from occurring with the next generation.

The change needs to begin today, here in Utah. SB0127 proposes new standards to protect children from institutional abuse. It proposes ethical standards for the use of restraint and seclusion and requires necessary reporting of critical incidents.

With proper training and accountable oversight, thousands of children may be spared from a life of trauma, serious injury or death. We are here today, using our voices on behalf of the entire survivor community, and our deceased peers who cannot be with us today. We ask that

you stand for them and the thousands of children currently in congregate care facilities by supporting SB0127.

Best,

Rebecca Moorman
BCS Investigation Lead & Co-founder

February 8, 2021

Chairman Todd D. Weiler
350 State St.
Salt Lake City, Utah 84103

Dear Chairman Weiler,

My name is Katherine McNamara and I'm writing to you today to express my support for SB0217. I am a co-founder of Breaking Code Silence and a survivor of institutional abuse at the hands of two separate Utah-owned "Troubled Teen" programs.

When I was 14 years old, I was dropped off at Provo Canyon School after having a difficult relationship with my parent after my sister died of cancer. When I had walked in there, I had never kissed a person, done drugs, or ran away. I was immediately strip searched and within minutes I was forced into isolation. I spent the better part of the next three months in and out of their solitary confinement until the stress forced my hair to fall out. I was told that my parents knew what was happening but even if I had tried to communicate what I was going through, all communication with them was monitored. I was heavily drugged without appropriate diagnosis, forced to have a pelvic exam, and often placed into isolation. I watched my peers be restrained for the smallest things and shot full of Haldol against their will. I watched friends who would be severely punished with isolation and restraint when they were having panic attacks.

I spent almost 2.5 years in and out of programs until I turned 18. When I came out of those programs, I was changed and not for the better. My relationship with my parents was not just difficult anymore – it was completely fractured. I struggled to communicate or socialize with my peers. I suffered nightmares of being kidnapped in the middle of the night or being back in those places. It wasn't until my late 20s that I was finally able to pick up the pieces. Sadly, so many people that I was in programs with were not as lucky. Many of my friends and peers in programs developed drug addictions after the program or committed suicide after they were released.

This bill is extremely important to me because as a founder of Breaking Code Silence and the administrator of several online survivor support groups, I speak to recent survivors of programs every day and they're going through the same things I went through or witnessed 20 years ago. I want to stop this cycle with strong oversight that will protect those in treatment and who need help.

For too long, this industry has hidden behind the excuse that we were all just troubled children and couldn't be believed. After years of working through the trauma, I was one of the lucky ones who was able to succeed. I am a 38-year-old educated woman with a successful career, marriage, and no criminal record. Sadly, I wasn't believed 20 years ago when I searched for

someone to listen. I hope today that I'm listened to and the other younger survivors have their voices believed as well by making this first step in passing SB0127.

We need action now because every day there isn't oversight is another day where we might lose another child in the program or after they leave. Treatment shouldn't create a community of survivors. Passing SB0127 would be a great start in preventing that.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter.

Sincerely,

Katherine McNamara

Breaking Code Silence Board Member and co-founder