

My name is Chelsea Filer and I am a founder of Breaking Code Silence.

Breaking Code Silence was created to elevate survivor voices due to an appalling lack of awareness of institutional child abuse and the affect it has had on our community of survivors. Without adequate laws and protections in place for youth, this cycle begins within our schools, and leads down the pipeline to institutionalization and incarceration.

When I was very young I was diagnosed with ADHD. I struggled in school and my grades were suffering. Without adequate services from my school district, my mother was referred to a residential treatment center. What I experienced within this facility will haunt me forever. I witnessed as a common practice, the use of dangerous prone restraints, used far too often and for nearly any reason the staff deemed appropriate. To this day I cannot remember a single incident that either I or my peers were actually a danger to ourselves or others, and yet, we were still restrained and placed in solitary confinement for days sometimes weeks at a time.

When I was 15 years old, I was awoken from my bed in the middle of the night by forceful transporters and threatened that I would be restrained if I resisted at all. Starting from my first day at the facility, I was kept in a small room called the "Restriction Room". I was held there for nearly 2 weeks. I was told to sit perfectly still for 6 hours straight before they would even let me stretch out my legs. If I spoke or moved at all I was restrained again and again, and their excuse was always that I was "non-compliant". Restraint was never used to protect my health and safety, it was a violent punitive punishment and infliction of such pain that to this day, I still have nightmares.

Over the course of my stay at this facility I was restrained more than 6 times. I sustained several injuries, including lacerations to my chin, a deep cut on my leg from broken tile in the isolation room, and a spinal injury that I still struggle with to this day. I can't even begin to describe the fear of losing my ability to breathe and believing that I would die, that I would suffocate under the weight of the staff members on top of me. All I could do was cry and beg for them to stop. But nothing would make them stop, not even telling them that I couldn't breathe. They would say, "if you can't breathe then why are you still screaming"

I know this sounds unbelievable, but I assure you that my story is not unique.

On April 29th, of last year, a 16 year old boy named Cornelius Fredricks - described by friends and family as a jovial boy - was tackled by seven staff members and improperly restrained for over 12 minutes for throwing a sandwich in the lunchroom. He was never a danger to himself or others. He begged for air until he uttered his last words "I can't breathe" and became unresponsive. According to the police report, several employees said they thought he was "faking it" and wasted critical time to get him medical attention. Cornelius eventually succumbed to his injuries and died all because he threw a sandwich.

The fact that I am here today to tell you my story is nothing short of a miracle. What I experienced could have easily led me to the outcome for Cornelius. To say the least, the use of prone restraint can be unreasonable, dangerous and even lethal. With so many other safe and proactive methods of crisis interventions available, we have no use for prone restraint. Not in our schools, not used on our children. Not here in Illinois.

We hope that change begins here today. By eliminating the use of dangerous and deadly forms of restraint we can take immediate action to minimize the risk of harm, injury and lifelong trauma, once and for all. With these policies in place and adequate training for staff we can curb this risk, and provide children with safe and dignified care.

Please support SB710 and protect the lives of Oregon's most vulnerable youth.