

Hello, my name is Jeni Canaday. I have been a disability Justice advocate for over 20 years, and I am opposed to SB 633.

My son, Zane, is Blind and Autistic and is impacted by complex communication challenges, therefore he qualifies as a student with complex and high cost disabilities.

I am here to share from our lived experience with segregated educational settings.

The first time Zane was placed in a special school outside of our community, he was eleven years old. The placement was not in our area, and was a 2 1/2 hour drive round trip from our home.

At the time, I thought this setting was what would be best for my son, as our local school district had failed to provide him with a truly accessible free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment.

But I was wrong.

Being so far away from home was traumatizing for him. It created more challenges and solved none.

Being separated impacted my ability to advocate for for him. And Navigating the separation and distance was hard on our entire family. Zane was always in fight or flight mode in a setting so far from home, and therefore was not able to learn.

The second segregated school setting that my son was in, was very harmful. He was 13 years old, and it was a program where they practiced Applied Behavioral Analysis. He was placed there on an IEP, but was not given a chance to learn. Instead the children were treated like science experiments. The program was focused on compliance training, not education. In that setting he referred to himself as a hostage, and he began asking me if he was a human. By the time I was able to pull him from the placement, he was severely traumatized by the inhumane behavioral intervention strategies they had used. It took a lot of advocacy for me to be given access to observing the program. If I wouldn't have been there to witness them attempting to force compliance, isolating and restraining these children, and using chemical restraints on them when the intervention didn't work, I may not have known to pull him out. Many of the children left that placement and went straight into

institutions, instead of being reunited with their families. I believe this is a huge risk that all children like my son face once they are placed in segregated settings.

Being segregated also deprived him of the opportunity to build relationships with his non disabled peers, and just as importantly, it deprived his non disabled peers the opportunity to learn from and be in community with children like my son.

Creating segregated regional centers would create issues with social relations, stigmatization, academic inclusion issues, re-integration problems, transportation and transition challenges.

Choosing this path would send a message that Intellectually and developmentally disabled children do not belong in public schools. We have moved passed this idea but have not focused on ensuring these kids receive adequate supports in their neighborhood schools.

Educators and policymakers should be sending a message to these vulnerable children that they do belong,

That they are worthy of community care,
and that they can succeed in their neighborhood schools.

We should be focusing on funding appropriate educational and mental health supports in our public schools and dedicating ourselves to a goal of true inclusion. This is the anti-ableist work.

If this bill passes it will open Pandora's box. We should not be moving backwards towards re-institutionalization, and the segregation of our most vulnerable.

The Disability Justice Movement has been picking up momentum. Let's keep moving forward in the fight against ableism.