

Submitter: Eriko Ono
On Behalf Of:
Committee: House Committee On Early Childhood and Human Services
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB4059

Dear Chair, Vice-Chairs, and Members of the House Committee On Early Childhood and Human Services,

My name is Eriko Ono and I am the mother of a 15 year old child with an intellectual disability called Syngap1 named Kenji. Kenji is currently a sophomore in our neighborhood public high school. School, particularly high school, has been a challenge for him. He becomes overwhelmed and has a difficult time with emotional regulation and communicating his needs. When he is dysregulated he can elope, hit, spit, kick and put himself in harms way. Kenji can also be incredibly joyful, silly and trusting. He has great difficulty reporting accurate information regarding what activities he's participated in, who was there, where he went and when things take place. If he is hurt or harmed- it would be near impossible to know how it happened. His pain tolerance is very high because of his disability. He has been misdiagnosed multiple times for fractures because he doesn't show normal amounts of physical distress.

I am writing to oppose HB 4059 because there are many, many children like Kenji. Children who would not be able to tell you if they are in danger or being abused. They are unlikely to offer you proof of abuse or who abused them. But their behavior would be indicators of stress, fear, and anxiety of certain places or people. They would show refusal to transition to places or people if they have been made to feel threatened. Kids like Kenji experience restraint, seclusion, and exclusion because of their escalated behaviors. Many people who work around these vulnerable populations do not have the right training and skills to de-escalate children and resort to physical contact far too often. As kids like Kenji grow older, they are even more at risk to physical altercations with adults who do not know how to work with them.

Redefining the criteria by which potential child abuse is investigated only hurts kids- but in particular vulnerable, disabled kids. And those who work with kids should be subject to strict scrutiny to ensure the safety, health and well being of each child. If we can detect and investigate abuse before the damage and trauma is inflicted to a child, why wouldn't we do that? I am so weary of being told the measures necessary to keep my child safe are not cost effective. We parents are told this so often in schools, the medical system, and in the community. You cannot put a price tag on protecting our most vulnerable kids.

-Thank you for your consideration,

Eriko Ono