

Testimony - SF 3534

Mira

LRC Youth Network

Student, SPPS

Dear Chair and Committee Members,

My name is Mira, and I am a member of the Youth Network at the Legal Rights Center and a high school student in the Saint Paul Public Schools district. I am here today, skipping school, on behalf of my peers who do not have the opportunity to use their voice. Too many lives have been taken at the hands of prone restraint, period. It is especially disturbing that prone restraints occur in a place where children are supposed to be nurtured. It's sickening to think about my countless peers- many of whom are Black, Brown, or disabled- who have lasting trauma from being held face down by an adult in an already stressful situation. Even more frightening is the thought that the adults entrusted with the responsibility of our education are willing to accommodate the wants of officers over the needs of students. It is our right to be safe in school, and the implementation of this bill quite literally blocks that right.

As we stride together on Minnesota's path to a safer education system, I urge everyone to look deeper into this bill and the various missteps that would be taken if implemented. Section 9, Subdivision 2 names "relationship building and open communication" an official duty of school resource officers. However, this is a moot point seeing as the requirement for open communication is no longer truly there after the striking of language that prohibits SRO's from carrying out "holding that restricts a pupil's...ability to communicate" and prone restraints in Section 2. In addition, my peers and I are concerned with Section 9, which in Subdivision 3 exempts school resource officers from duties described in Subdivision 2, paragraph (a), clause 4 and 5 if they are unable to complete training before commencing their work in schools. However, they are still required to carry out the duty of protecting "students, staff, and visitors to the school grounds from criminal activity". Children as young as those in middle school are legally capable of committing a crime, and with this bill SRO's would be legally permitted to use life-threatening holds on these kids *before being trained*. I see everyday the benefits of positive relationships between school personnel and students. If SRO's are truly fit to complete their duties and are committed to completing training and making school a safe place for students, the use of prone restraint is *always* uncalled for and should remain not allowed, as it is in *adult prisons*.

As a student, it feels as though there are many 'can't's. I can't... buy a lottery ticket. I can't vote. I can't control when and how adults feel it is necessary to exercise their power in a fatally violent manner over literal children. I can't express to you all the extent of the hurt that would be felt by the countless Black, Brown, and disabled students disproportionately affected by House File #3489. What I can do is reiterate what is already common sense: in no world is prone restraint an effective way to go about our children's education which, as said by Governor Walz, is supposed to "conjure the magic of promising beginnings and the grace of second chances". Please listen to the voices of Minnesota's youth as you go about this legislative session- our safety and our futures are in your hands.